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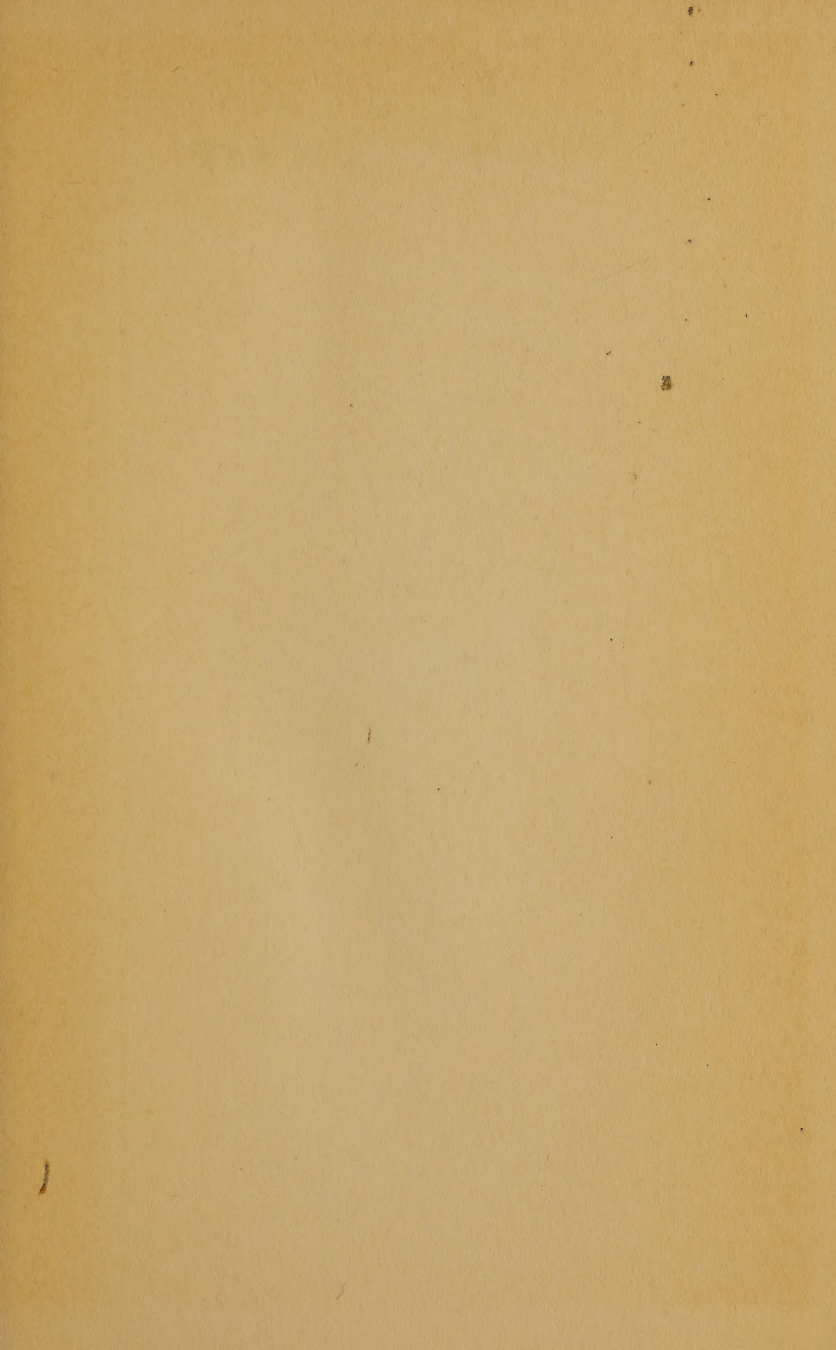
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# The High Forfeit



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# The High Forfeit

A Novel by

BASIL KING

*Author of* THE HAPPY ISLES *etc.*



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THE HIGH FORFEIT

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# The High Forfeit



# The High Forfeit

## *Chapter I*

Now that the time had come, she found the process of eloping simpler than she had expected. It was also more prosaic. In suggesting this matrimonial method she had supposed that George would come for her in a motor car at dawn; that she would steal away to meet him while the family was asleep; that their new life together would open with the sunrise. She had expected to be watched, guarded, and possibly driven to dramatic dangers and escapes.

It was now ten days since her father had been aware of her intention. At least she hoped that he understood it as her intention. He had a way of taking it for granted that nothing could be anyone's intention which he himself forbade; but to that she supposed he took her as an exception. They had had many tussles during the course of her twenty-five years, but she could hardly remember one in which he had not given in. The law by which fathers give in because they love their children, because they love their daughters especially, was one of the profoundest of natural principles. If it were not for its intervention all the strength would be on one side, all the weakness on the other. As it was, the rule of control by love adjusted the balance for youth, making it irresistible. With regard to her father, Theo was



convinced that she could do anything she liked, and sooner or later see him come round to accept the accomplished fact.

The time she chose for her challenge was an August evening warm enough to stroll out of doors without wraps, and yet cooled by the wind from the ocean not ten miles away. This part of Long Island, while niggard of picturesque beauty, was known for these scented summer evenings, starry and soft, which abetted and incited the yearnings of romantic youth. They may even have abetted and incited the yearnings of romantic middle age, for Theo had noticed that her father was as fond of the velvety darkness, with its hints of straining toward the infinite, as she was, herself. After they had finished their family game of bridge, after Sheila had gone to bed, after Mrs. Blent had said as she said almost every evening when they chanced to be alone, "Well, I'll go up and get my dress off," Jackson Blent lit a big cigar and strayed toward the open French window giving on the terrace.

His wife eyed him anxiously. "I hope you're not going far, Jackson. Don't forget what the doctor told you about exertion before going to bed."

"All right, all right," Blent had grumbled, and disappeared into the darkness.

Theo knew it was her chance. She knew it was also a crisis. There had been other chances and crises in her life, but none of the gravity of this one. Had it not been, on the one hand, for the immensity of her love for George, and on the other for the certainty that in the struggle she foresaw love would compel her parents to capitulate, she would have been more afraid than she actually was.

Sitting for a few minutes longer in the solitude of the big living room, she was glad that the minute for speaking had arrived. Not only would it end secrecy, but it would give her George. Not only would it give her George, but it would put George himself where he belonged. In spite of his talents and his looks, he was still a subordinate, when he should have been rich and dominant. It had been exactly her father's situation before he had eloped with her mother thirty years earlier; and just as that marriage had made him in the course of time one of the conspicuous figures in the financial world of New York, so this marriage would do for George Pevensey. Her grandfather Spencer had accepted her father, however unwillingly. For that very reason, if for no other, her father could scarcely refuse to accept George. But George himself, she was sure, would be his own commendation as soon as the family came to know him. He was so handsome and gentle, so silent and strong! He had been such a hero in the war! All she needed was the chance to show him to them as he was. The intense maternal element in her love drove her at last to go and make her plea almost without fear or self-consciousness.

Stepping on the great semicircular terrace, she entered a world of starlit immensities. She knew where to find her father. He would be standing by the stone balustrade which bounded the terrace, or perhaps sitting down on it. As a matter of fact, he was sitting down, his back to the infinite, while his eyes wandered vaguely over the long lighted front of the house. As Theo approached him, it was he who spoke first.

"Did the Allenbys ask you to go with Spen to-night?"

"Yes, and I didn't want to."

"Why didn't you?"

Sitting down beside him, she answered, a little wearily: "Oh, I don't know. They bore me. Is Spen going to marry Helen?"

He leaned back slightly, a bulky figure, to knock off the ash from his cigar among the hollyhocks lining the retaining wall below them. "He hasn't said anything to me, but it strikes me as looking that way."

"I hope he won't. I never can understand what you and he see in them."

The father said, coldly, "They're one of the few very distinguished families in the country."

"Yes, and they know it. They'd never stop rubbing it into us that we're not. As a matter of fact, Helen wouldn't look at Spen if they were not hard up for money. Father," she went on, rapidly, "why can't we just be ourselves, without all this caring for better social standing and what other people think? Why should we run after people like the Allenbys, who only condescend to us? Your own position is very good. Why shouldn't we live with people who acknowledge that, instead of trying to get in with those who don't? Wouldn't you rather that the men whom Sheila and I marry, or the woman whom Spencer marries, looked up to us with honor rather than down on us as people with whom they only take up because we're rich?"

"I don't see that that's the question here. The Allenbys are our nearest neighbors. If Spen and Helen are in love with each other, the match would be what is called a suitable one. Spen will have the



cash, and if she brings standing in the world, what is there to say against it? Spen's standing in the world will be good enough as it is; but if his wife can make it better—"

Dropping this subject, Theo allowed him to smoke in silence. When she spoke her deep contralto voice had become lower than before, and possibly a little tremulous.

"Father, do you remember George Pevensey?"

He repeated the name. "Pevensey! Pevensey! Why, of course I do! He's the wounded hero. He's still a bookkeeper in the bank. See him every day."

"You remember, don't you, how when he was invalided home you had him brought down here to spend his convalescence? He stayed in the chauffeur's house with Tremlett and Mrs. Tremlett."

"Perfectly! Had very distinguished record. Of the three fellows we sent from the bank one was killed near Château-Thierry, one didn't get a scratch, and this fellow, who had crept up to be a major, got a dose of shrapnel in his foot. All kinds of things to his credit. Was proud of him as a representative of the Hudson River Trust in time of war. Remember perfectly. Had him down here till he was able to get about again. Couldn't do less for a man who had lamed himself for life in the service of his country."

"And do you remember that you asked me to look after him, to drive him about when he was able to take the air, and see that he wasn't bored?"

"Seems to me I do. You did it, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did it. I did it very often—oftener, perhaps, than you suppose."

Taking the cigar from his lips, he stared down at her through the darkness. "Well, what of it? It

must have been nearly two years ago. Why are you digging it up now?"

"Did it ever occur to you, when you asked me to look after him, that he was a gentleman, that he was a hero, that he was very good-looking, and that I might fall in love with him?"

Throwing the cigar on the ground, he stamped on it. "No, and it doesn't occur to me now. That sort of thing doesn't happen."

"But it has happened."

"Then it can *un*happen, and as soon as you like. I shan't tolerate any nonsense."

"I'm twenty-five, papa. I've a right to make up my own mind. I love this man and I'm going to marry him."

"You're going to do nothing of the sort." Standing up, he made as if to return to the house. "I'll hear no more about it. The thing can't be, and you might as well dismiss it from your mind."

She was not dismayed by the finality of this tone. She was used to it. It was the idiom in which he had always forbidden his wife or children anything. Her mother, her brother, her sister, accepted his veto obediently. She herself never had. Having established a position of independence, she expected him to acknowledge it, and had all sorts of supporting precedents. When, for example, he had forbidden her to buy an Irish hunter which he thought she couldn't ride, and she had calmly completed her bargain, he had paid the bill with no more than a little grumbling. When he had told her that he wouldn't hear of her joining a party to visit the devastated regions of Flanders and France, he yielded the point as soon as she had made her plans, and gave her a letter of credit.

In the same way he had declared with violence that he would not consent to her owning a motor car and driving it herself; but when the car was in the garage and she in possession of her license, he had nothing more to say. His speech having so much vehemence, she had learned to discount it. He would say such things; he had always said them; but in the end his love, which was of the nature of adoration, would not refuse her anything.

As he turned toward the house she slipped her arm through his, so that together they moved slowly across the wide semicircle of terraced grass. "If I've met the man I can love, and feel that I could never love anybody else, why shouldn't I marry him, papa?"

"You know perfectly well, darling, that I've other plans for you."

"Yes, I know; but they've never been the plans that I've had for myself. You want me to make a brilliant match for the same reason that you'd like to see Spen marry Helen Allenby. But I don't feel that way. I can't. I don't know how. You were disappointed when I didn't accept that nice Sir Maurice Tempest; but I couldn't help myself. I didn't care for him; I knew he didn't particularly care for me. I represented to him so much money masked behind a more or less pleasing personality. That was good enough for him, but it wasn't good enough for me. You've been disappointed when the same kind of thing has happened with other men. In some ways it must be a grief to you. But what else can I do?"

"I should think you could easily do something else. You could remember that you're knocking on the head the plans and ambitions I've been building up for you ever since you were born."

"Well, suppose I am. Plans and ambitions aren't everything. Love is. If you were to let me do as I want, you'd be giving up hopes which must have been uncertain at the best of times. If I were to do as you want I'd be ruining my whole life. If each of us is asking a sacrifice of the other, I'm begging only a little one of you, while you're insisting that mine should be the most terrible a woman can ever make."

"I'm not thinking of sacrifice. My only aim is to save you from folly and disaster."

They stood now in the light that streamed from the open French window of the sitting room. He was a big, florid man, unwieldy, perhaps apoplectic, carelessly dressed in a dinner jacket, with his black cravat awry. Though she was nearly up to the middle height, his great size made her seem small in comparison, and delicately tense. There was daring in the way she held her head. There was defiance on her lips and in her eyes. It was defiance, affection, and a great admiration and honor, all mingled incoherently, in a way which made her his own child. Spence and Sheila were their mother's children, with the Spencer habit of unwilling submission. She was a Blent, with the Blent self-will, with something even of the Blent unscrupulous audacity. Unable, of course, to make this analysis, she recognized it only as an impulse to get her own way stronger than she could curb.

Her look was as straight as her body was vibrant and taut. "It's too late to save me from folly and disaster, if that's what you call my marrying George Pevensey. I'm going to do it. If you don't let me do it publicly I shall go off and do it clandestinely.

I'm twenty-five. Surely I've the right to know my own mind, and follow what it tells me."

He spoke quietly, and in what seemed to her a tone of solemnity. "You've a perfect right, dear. No one can question it. I should be the last to try. I can only tell you what will happen when you've done it. You'll cease to be one of us. If you ever become free again—and there are ways of doing that, as you know—you'll find your old place here for you when you come back."

The threat defeated its own ends by being too extreme. If there were things that couldn't happen, this was one of them. That she should cease to belong to a family to whom she was devoted, as they to her, was not possible. They could no more cut themselves away from her than she could cut herself away from them. It was not that she discredited her father's intention at the time; it was only that she knew he would repent of it. Looking up at him with that same expression of love mingled with defiance, she was unable to put her protest into words before he went on again.

He reverted to his earlier tone, that which put an end to discussion. "But what's the use of talking? I say you're not to do it. That settles it. Now give me a kiss, and let's hear no more about it."



## Chapter II

It was the wrong method. Though he had brought her up, and had lived with her in the intimate companionship often possible between fathers and their first-born girls, he had never understood that basic trait in her character which lay in her rebelliousness. Dimly her mother had recognized the fact that the surest way to make Theo do anything was to tell her that she mustn't. At least a score of maternal anecdotes illustrated what to Mrs. Blent was a strange and unnatural tendency. But they failed to prepare Jackson Blent to see in her the spirit that only needs the whip to make it run away. His own many defeats at her hands had left him still secure in his conviction that she did as he told her, like all the rest of the family. Where she saw herself as an exception, he saw only the rule. The supreme lord of his household, he assumed that he had been obeyed even when the facts must have shown him that he was twisted around her little finger. Having only to forbid, he forbade, while to her the prohibition was but an incitement to go forward.

Expecting to see revolution in the family the next morning, Theo was surprised to find the usual tranquillity. Her father had not revealed her secret to her mother, so that her mother had not confided it to Spen and Sheila. It was curious that there should be so wild a tempest in herself, and all this calm about her. It seemed as if they *must* know, and yet appar-

ently no one did. From her father's memory the conversation on the terrace seemed to have dropped away. Not only did he not refer to it again, but he did not allow it to change or influence his manner. She might never have told him anything. He was just as affectionate, just as playful, just as irritable and dictatorial, as he had always been. It was disconcerting.

It threw her back on what she had heard of his situation and her mother's thirty years before. Between what had happened to Jackson Blent and Augusta Spencer in 1891 the parallel with her own case and George Pevensey's was so striking that she was eager for more details of the past. Stray facts had drifted her way, of course, but, though she had registered them, she had never given them much attention. She knew that her father was the son of Peter Blent, who had kept a livery stable in Brooklyn. She knew also that the sign Blent's Livery Stable could still be seen if you drove through the right street. Graduating from the public schools, her father had found himself a bookkeeper in the Hudson River National Bank, of which the controlling interest lay with the Spencer family. It was not a great institution, but it was a solid one, and conservative. Josiah Spencer, a widower with one daughter, who would therefore be his heiress, was the president. Between him and the bookkeeper Jackson Blent, there was exactly the same distance as now lay between Jackson Blent and the bookkeeper George Pevensey. She wondered how it had been bridged. She could not remember to have heard. As a matter of fact, when she tried to think of what she knew of the ancestral elopement she could only work back to hints and mysteries.

Since it was important for her to know, she tried to approach her mother tactfully. It was necessary to do this tactfully because she had noticed in her mother an unwillingness to talk of her courtship by Jackson Blent, or of the details of their marriage. If the subject cropped up she grew flustered or vexed, and edged away from it. Jackson Blent himself never mentioned it. If anyone else ever did, he found a way to stop the discussion at the opening remark. Now that, for the first time in her life, she thought it over, Theo drew the conclusion that between her father and mother it was the cause of some uneasiness.

Nevertheless, she made her attempt to reach such facts as might help her in her own situation. She was driving home with her mother in the latter's big car after a round of calls. Mrs. Blent was punctilious in this exercise, but disliked doing it alone. With the shyness of a good, kind, wholly conventional soul, who feels herself under a cloud for having once in her life done a wildly unconventional thing that had caused a permanent scandal, she felt shielded, and somehow justified, when upheld by the presence of the one or the other of her daughters. As Sheila, at sixteen, was too young to serve this purpose oftener than now and then, Theo was her mother's usual companion. Their last call having been at a distance of some miles from home, the return drive offered the girl the opening she was looking for.

She spoke first of her father's health, and though on that score Mrs. Blent had nothing new to say, she said over again the things she had often said before. He had come to the age at which he must take care of himself. His heart was all the more a danger because

of his great bulk. The doctor had hinted in confidence that he might go off at any time. She herself was worried, though Theo, like any other member of the younger generation, couldn't seriously think of this strong rock as being undermined. She got nearer to her point when she said:

"As a young man he must have been awfully good-looking."

With the nervous rustling movement of a hen disturbed while nesting, Mrs. Blent admitted that he had been. A plump little woman, always too elaborately dressed for the country, she had gained rather than lost in her looks by passing into the fifties. At the time of her wooing by Jackson Blent she had been a bland, rather blank, young woman, no more to be distinguished from thousands of her age and type than one ox-eyed daisy from another. If marriage, suffering, and motherhood had not stamped her with character, they had at least created a mild, fussy personality, striving to make the best of the *status quo*. Theo crept still nearer her objective.

"How on earth did you ever get to know him, when your social positions were so different?"

Mrs. Blent continued to fidget in her corner. "Mercy, Theo! What do you want to go back to that for?"

"Well, I've often wondered. If you were living in Fifth Avenue, and father with his own family over in Brooklyn, I don't see—"

The answer had a kind of impatient finality. "If you want to know, it was at our own house. My father had sent him with a bundle of papers—securities, I think they were—which he was not to deliver to anyone but a member of the family. That meant

Aunt Katty, or Aunt Lavinia—she was living then—or me. As it happened, it was I. I saw him in the drawing-room. I couldn't help asking him to sit down, and we had a little talk. That was the beginning. Now don't bother me about it any more."

But Theo persisted. "But when you married father, weren't you afraid that your own father would turn you adrift?"

"No, of course I wasn't."

"Why not?"

"For one thing, because he was too fond of me. He may not have liked the match, but still less would he have liked to think I was starving to death. Now don't talk to me any more about it."

"He may not have liked the match, but still less would he have liked to think I was starving to death." From the talk with her mother Theo had that much to the good. It expressed the fundamental truth on which she based her operations. Her father wouldn't like the match, but still less would he like to think that she was starving to death. It put the whole thing in a nutshell. Once she had married George Pevensey the family wouldn't be able to help themselves. While she disliked putting them in this odious position, the fact that having George as a member of the family would in the long run prove a boon to them justified any measures she might take.

For what happened thirty years earlier she had still a source of information in Aunt Katty. Aunt Katty was her mother's aunt, and her own greataunt. The last survivor of the Spencers, she promised at ninety-four to outlive all who bore the name of Blent. Rich by inheritance, she had grown still richer when the Hudson River National Bank was reorganized under



Jackson Blent as the Hudson River Trust, with a large increase in capital and operations. It could not be said that any of the Blents, not even Theo or Sheila, loved Aunt Katty, while Aunt Katty looked upon herself as the avenging spirit of the Spencers pursuing the Blents to the last recesses of their consciences. It was not because she couldn't have had her own establishment that she lived with them; rather she enjoyed the feeling that her presence was a daily torture to Jackson and Augusta, while of the children she scarcely thought at all.

Theo found her opportunity on seeing Aunt Katty alone in the garden, seated in her bath-chair. Primrose, her man, and Tollett, her woman, having been dismissed for the minute, she read the New York morning paper, her only literature, in the shade of a great elm. Strolling along a path, Theo sat down on a rustic seat at a few paces from her relative. The latter glanced up over her horn spectacles, but returned to her newspaper. Dressed in white, with a good deal of fluffy embroidery and many baby-blue bows, she wore a lingerie hat, such as little girls often wear, with a dangling embroidered brim. Her wax-white face had the ancient lines and prominent nose and chin which suggest the sibylline.

When she spoke, her voice was high-pitched and cracked. Her choice of words had the racy crudeness of the generations before the epoch of American refinement set in.

"What's the matter with you, mopin' round like a wet cat?"

Theo took the question as helping her out. "I'm not moping, Aunt Katty. I'm only thinking about papa."

Aunt Katty gave a laugh like the whoop of a cock-  
atoo. "What's started you doin' that?"

"I've been wondering how—considering the way in  
which he and mother got married—my grandfather  
Spencer—and you—and the rest of the family—ever  
got over it."

"We didn't. Haven't finished with him yet."

Theo was obliged to wait till Aunt Katty had  
stopped shrieking over her own joke before she could  
go on.

"Were you there when father and mother came  
back to say they had been married?"

"You bet I was; in the front row. Thought my  
brother, your grandfather, would kill him. Lavinia  
and I were yellin' at him to do it. 'Kill him! Kill  
him!' we screeched at him, just as if we were two wild  
cats. He'd have done it, too, if he'd had a gun, only  
that your fool of a mother began to cry. That settled  
it, and made Jackson Blent what he is to-day." Crow-  
ing to herself, she seemed to withdraw from Theo,  
indulging in comments for her own benefit. "I don't  
care. I guess I've punished him. Always had to  
live with me, and always will. You'll see. I'll bury  
him. He'll never get away from me." She returned  
to Theo. "Your fool of a mother got her punish-  
ment, too. Got it quick and got it hard. My gracious  
Lord of glory! what a time we had, Lavinia and me,  
when Augusta found out that she'd been bamboozled  
all along the line! You'd hardly believe it, but she'd  
married the man, thinking she'd inspired a grand pas-  
sion. Her! a little snub-nosed, putty-faced chump,  
not half as good-looking as she is to-day, and you can  
see for yourself what that is! She'd no more sex-  
appeal—that's your word for it now, I believe—than

if she'd been the butcher's boy. When she found out that Jackson Blent didn't care about anything but her money—well, it was nuts for Lavinia and me, who hadn't expected that she'd get her come-uppance so quick and spanky."

Theo began to see why her father and mother were never willing to talk of their romance. She was still thinking of this when Aunt Katty went on again.

"That was about the time your brother Spen was born. He was just the kind of baby you might have expected from a marriage built on tricks and lies. Augusta was ashamed to show him to her friends. That's another thing. The sins of the fathers do get visited on the children. You all show it. You can't expect normal, good-looking children out of such beginnings. I've always been sorry for the lot of you—poor, spindly things who'll never come to any good. Well, I've got *my* money tied up and left to them that'll know how to use it. I could buy and sell the whole clan of you. Anyone who thinks they'll be better off when my place is empty—"

Theo broke in with what was more to her purpose. "How long was it before my grandfather Spencer said he would take my father as his son-in-law?"

"About as long as your mother cried. In spite of Lavinia and me, it was all over by that time. My poor brother—"

"He and my father got along very well together, didn't they?"

"About as well as a rabbit in a hutch gets along with the boy who feeds him. My brother was the rabbit." She looked up sharply. "But what do you want to know for? I can't imagine why you come pesterin' me, unless it is that you're in love."

Theo smiled feebly. "I don't see why you should say that."

"I don't see, either, except that for the past few days you've been lookin' like a scarecrow. But let me tell you this. If you think of playin' the same trick on Jackson Blent he played on my poor brother, you'll find yourself up against a tougher customer. My gracious Lord of glory! I'd like to see you do it! If you did, I almost think I'd leave you something in my will. I've always said that his chickens would come home to roost, but I never could see how."

Her shriek of laughter ringing through the garden alarmed Theo into getting to her feet in order to slip away. "I don't see how you can see it now—from anything I've said."

"Not from anything you've said, but from everything you look. I bet a quarter that you've something up your sleeve."

Beyond this turning of the tables on herself Theo got nothing more from Aunt Katty. None the less, all she heard from her, all she heard from her mother, made her the more sure of her father. He, too, would be ready, for a minute or more, to kill George Pevensey, and find his wrath paralyzed by the fact that she had become his wife. Once that point was reached, the rest would be easy. She could understand that for the Spencers to assimilate her father might have been impossible; but no family could hold out against a man like George, with his charm of looks and character.



### Chapter III

OF this she was obliged to convince an honest young man much less sure of his charm of looks and character than she was. To do him justice, he did possess this charm, but he possessed it with the drawbacks of a slow speech in which was an incipient stammer, and a mind that moved from point to point cautiously, without imagination, and above all without recklessness. Almost anyone could "talk all round him," as the saying went, while he stood smiling and confused. It was not that they were ahead of his understandings; they were only ahead of his articulation. He knew what they meant; especially he knew what he meant, himself; but, unless it was now and then, in times of extraordinary passion and excitement, words were not the counters for his thoughts. No such complaint had ever been made of him when he led his men in France, but, once the pressure of need was taken off, he fell back on speechlessness.

With Theo he was helpless. Her flaming nature, her imperious will, her command of perfectly reasonable language of which he admitted all the conviction except in so far as it didn't wholly convince *him*, all this caught him at the weakest points of his weaknesses. Moreover, she was to him a princess, a goddess, one of another order than his own, whose word and will he could hardly dare to question. Imagine a healthy, simple, perfectly normal young American being wafted by some exquisite djinn of the *Arabian*

*Nights* to the threshold of a marvelous land of which he knows nothing of the language or the ways. Something like this had happened to George Pevensey. Transported to the edge of a sphere for whose mode of life he felt no aptitudes, he could hardly refuse to believe the supernatural power which insisted that he had them. He could hardly refuse to believe that she was right in everything, since she belonged to a race so far above him, so rich and powerful, so endowed with the knowledge and authority which go with inheriting the earth.

That he should have fallen in love with her had nothing strange in it. He knew he had done so by the third or fourth time of seeing her. That could be his joy and his misfortune all at once. He never thought of its being anything else. All through that summer of 1919, when he lived in the chauffeur's house at Blentwood and was nursed and regaled and entertained with the prodigal solicitude we showed our heroes when heroes were a novelty, he dreamed of nothing but to keep his passion to himself. As a matter of fact, anything else would have been folly. Whatever her condescension to him, the distance between them remained impassable. He was an employee in the bank of which her father was the president. If he ranked above the servants, it was not so far as to give him much of an advantage. He lived with the chauffeur and his wife, "better" than they, perhaps, and yet not so much "better" as to warrant his ever being invited to the big house for so much as a cup of tea. He accepted this distinction without a second thought. It was as much a matter of course to him as it is to ladies and gentlemen in waiting at a court to live in their own secondary and

intermediate region between royalty and the humbler world.

What he never thought of was that, with his sunny looks, his kind blue eyes, his modest manliness, and his head of a blond Hercules, he had the kind of appeal to which certain women are sensitive. He couldn't think of it because he didn't know it. Neither did he know that Miss Theodosia Blent, whom he regarded with such respectful awe, had long ago seen in a vision some such figure as himself. The fact that her family was eager to have her make a brilliant match—the brilliancy being in the social standing of the bridegroom, since money was no object—had driven her perversity of will back on the longing for a MAN. She spelled the word in capitals so as to segregate the essential noble masculine qualities from everything fortuitous.

The essential noble masculine qualities were exactly those which George Pevensey exemplified. His record in the war had been a splendid one. If the American system had possessed the degrees of recognition as to which the British show themselves such experts in human nature, he would have received an M.C., or a D.S.O., or possibly a Victoria Cross. "Mentioned in dispatches," would have been coupled with his name time and time again. But of all this Theo would never have known anything had not her father, in that first flush of enthusiasm which had long ago faded like a sunset, taken the trouble to find out. From George she learned nothing, even when she questioned him. He had plenty to say of other fellows' pluck, but nothing of his own. She assured herself that this was not a soldier's pose. It was part of that kind of humility of character which goes with strength. He was meant

for big things. Nothing but one of those horrid, unholy accidents with which life is strewn had made him the victim of small ones. Even so—he was a MAN—the first she had ever known, the sole example of the type whom she thought that life would ever bring her way.

She had come to this conclusion long before the summer of his convalescence was at an end. All through August and into September, she had had her secret, just as he had had his. But she had hers, with a difference. While he saw chiefly the distance between them, she saw the similarity and the common ground. In her mind the human qualities were uppermost; in his the economic and the social. The economic and the social were negligible to her, because she had never had to think of them. For him they were everything, since, with the world as it is, they made her what she was, they made him what he was himself, each in conditions that might touch but never mingle.

In the early days of September he was pronounced sufficiently well to return to work. The two dreams were over. He would see his princess retreat once more into the inviolate world of her own regality, while for her the MAN would pass on to the world in which MEN lived and leave her with the pygmies. Even that revolted her less than the fact that the MAN must go back to a drudgery for which a pygmy would have been sufficient, his strength and heroism chained to a desk like Prometheus to his rock. She chafed at that injustice even more than at the prospect of her own emptiness of life after he had gone.

But for Theodosia Blent to chafe at an injustice was to set her to adjusting it. All her rebellions were positive. All her perceptions of wrong were



also perceptions of righting them. From the one to the other she passed in a flash and with the fullest measure of self-confidence. She knew what to do. She knew what to do, not only in what concerned herself, but in what concerned other people. She was not meddlesome; she was only ardent and generous with a force which swept opposition away. Within the family there was only Aunt Katty who could wholly resist the onset of her good will. Now it was her mother; now it was Sheila; less frequently it was her father; and least frequently of all it was Spen; but at one time or another all came under a dictation which knew what was good for them and saw that it was done. All the servants, all the gardeners, all the chauffeurs, were subject to the same beneficent autocracy when sickness, or sorrow, or any other kind of need called for sympathy administered with a high hand. She sent them to the country when they didn't want to go; she took them to the seaside when they would rather have seen the shows on Broadway; she drove them to the shows on Broadway when they would have preferred staying in their beds; but rarely did they ever come home otherwise than improved in health and spirits. If her helpfulness was tyrannical, it was practically always right, so that in the excess of her self-devotion she had little to repent of.

This ardor of character was now engaged on behalf of George Pevensey. It would have been engaged on his behalf even if she hadn't been in love with him. Knowing all about him, she knew that his present place was beneath his value and his birth. She would never forget the scrap of conversation in which he had given her the short and simple annals of his history. That had been in the middle of the first sum-

mer, just when they were beginning to be intimate. Speaking of his work, he had admitted that after the excitement of the war, and this glorious loafing in the country, it would be something of a bore to go back to it. She then asked the question which already for a week or two had been on her mind.

"But what made you *be* a bookkeeper? That's what I don't understand."

He replied in his slow, dragging voice, in which the impediment was neither a stammer nor a lisp, but a kind of hesitation. "Because I couldn't help myself. I didn't choose to be a bookkeeper. You don't suppose any of our lot *chooses* to be what he afterward becomes. We get caught. We get caught from the word, Go."

They had got out of the car to pick blackberries by the roadside, like two children. The road was a grassy, unfrequented one, which they had dropped into the habit of taking because in it Theo never met anyone she knew. The privacy of these untraveled lanes gave them that sense of being alone together which each was beginning to recognize as an enchantment.

Theo drew toward her a long, graceful blackberry vine, picking off the luscious fruit. "I don't see how you need be caught—if you don't want to be.

"That's because you don't understand." The sunny smile he turned toward her was without resentment against Fate. "I'll tell you how it happens. My case is like nearly every other case. My father was professor of English in a little sectarian college in a little Western town. Anyone who's lived your life can hardly believe what that means in the way of poverty."

She thought that here he must be using a figure of

speech. "Oh, but you don't mean the poverty of the actually poor?"

"That's exactly what I do mean—the poverty in which there are no new shoes for the children—nor quite enough to eat—but always a kind of position to keep up. You see, the country lives on ideas, but never wants to pay for them."

"Why doesn't it?"

The slow, sympathetic voice tried to word an explanation. "That's one of the mysteries which I don't believe anyone has ever solved. I can remember how my father used to talk of it. He said that the most essential things to the national life were education and religion, but that there was no meanness which the nation didn't practice toward the men and women who taught them. Go where you like, and you'll always find that the worst paid people in the country are teachers, preachers, and professors."

She brought him six or eight fine blackberries disposed in the palm of her hand. "Well, they don't get caught, at any rate. They must go in for doing that of their own accord."

He took two or three of the berries, while insisting that she eat the rest. "That's what puts them ahead of fellows like me. They do choose. They choose to serve their fellow men and get next to nothing in return. It's what my father did. He had fifteen hundred dollars a year and a little house. There were five of us children, another brother and three little sisters, all younger than myself. If my father had lived he'd have wanted to put me through his college and perhaps have made me a minister. I might even have been one—"

She broke in fervently, but with a laugh. "I'm glad you're not."

"But he died when I was fourteen. For the next two years my mother managed somehow to keep me in school, but I had to pick up odd jobs out of school hours and on holidays, to help her. There was a man near us who had a creamery. On Saturdays he always had a full house. I used to help him take in the cash and keep the accounts. I got a dollar a day—and it seemed a lot to us."

"Oh, you poor little boy!"

"Well, I was pretty good at figures, and I'd had that experience in the creamery. When I graduated from the high school there was a job to be had as assistant bookkeeper in our local national bank. The president had been a friend of my father's and he saw that I got it. It was a great lift for my mother and we thought ourselves lucky. I couldn't pick or choose. I couldn't wait. None of our crowd can. We have to do the first thing that turns up. I got fifteen dollars a week at that bank—"

"Only fifteen dollars for a whole week's work?"

"Then I went to Elmira, at twenty-five a week; and finally to the Hudson River Trust at thirty-five. For a fellow in my position, that's not so bad. One of these days I hope to be an accountant. An accountant makes . . ."

It was her first contact with the vast invisible horde of the poor genteel. She knew this horde existed; she knew it filled in all the space between the classes which used to be known as the rich and the poor but are now more exactly described by variants on the terms of capital and labor. She called it invisible because she never looked at it. She touched it; she



made use of it; she never bought a book, a pair of slippers, or a postage stamp, without doing it through some member of the tribe. But she didn't see the man. She wouldn't have remembered him five minutes after having made her purchase. As far as the human or the personal was concerned, he might have been a nickel-in-the-slot machine. With servants she had definite relations, in which even the affections could be engaged; but from the huge populace who were neither servants nor people of her own kind, who served the shops, the offices, the banks, she felt herself as far removed as if they were inhabitants of another planet. Even now she wasn't thinking of the limitations of the class. Her problem was as to how to get George Pevensey out of it.

The summer had practically ended when the crisis came; and to both it came unexpectedly. As far as either knew, there had been no premonition, no warning. Each had been satisfied with the command of his or her own secret. That the other had a secret was scarcely a subject for suspicion. If it was, it was suspicion so deep down in the subconscious as hardly to make itself known before both were overwhelmed by the fact.

They had taken their last drive together. Because it was the last they had made it long. Dusk was already gathering by the time Pevensey, who was now strong enough to take the wheel, turned the machine into the little secluded garage which sheltered Theo's two cars.

As they got out in the dim, cool cavern which was not to see them coming back again, Pevensey tried to stammer a few words of gratitude which were also meant to be words of farewell.

Then she was in his arms.

Neither could have told how it happened. A strong, sudden emotional sensation drew them together. It was as distinctly a sensation as an electric shock. Something had passed from him to her, and from her back again to him. It put them into a new world. For neither could anything be the same as it had been before. Explanations, avowals, confessions were all superfluous. Everything had been said. All that remained was to know what to do, and before that necessity even Theo's self-confidence broke down.

The new world was a kind of world such as she had never contemplated. It would have laws and necessities all its own. Positive and high-handed as she was by nature, the shock of this ecstasy unnerved her. Having slipped from his arms, she dropped to the running-board of the car, and cried.

It had taken them two whole years to work out their problem. Their meetings could not but be secret and seldom, but at them the question to which they came back again and again, and forever again, was as to what they were to do. If there came to be between them what is known as an engagement, neither could have told the date of it. For anything so marked as an engagement they were not sufficiently definite. They lived on assumptions, the chief assumption being that somehow and some day they would marry. To that they held tenaciously, even when all the arguments of common sense seemed most cruelly against it.

It has to be admitted that the arguments of common sense were more apparent to George Pevensy than to her. This could hardly have been otherwise. He lived in a world fenced round by inhibitions. He was used to the impossible. On thirty-five dollars a

week the impossible met you at every turn you took. It was often impossible to go to a theater or to dine in a restaurant or do any of a thousand things as to which she would not have thought twice. That it was impossible for him to marry her was often his heart's conviction even when with his lips he told her that nothing else was to be considered. She, on the other hand, was accustomed to seeing circumstances give way. Inhibitions had been no part of her experience of life. A large liberty of action had supplemented her imperious self-will as long as she could remember anything. That it should fail her here where she needed it most was not to be considered. However despondent he at times became, she, on the contrary, was always resolute and unwavering.

That her courage was based on ignorance of any kind of life but her own was not hard for him to see. It was not hard for him to see that in spite of everything he told her she never entered into his experience at all. The self-denials of life in New York, even for an unmarried man, on forty-five dollars a week—the figure to which his pay had been raised in recognition of his services in the war—passed over her. She had no idea of what they meant; she couldn't take them in. In life you always had money. Other people might have to do without it, but one had it oneself. The people one lived with had it too, at least in a measure to give them a reasonable freedom. There was no other point of view. Notwithstanding his insistence on his lack of means, he would find her suggesting, in the impossible case of her father's not relenting and forgiving them, that they might go and live in Rome. With the exchange in their favor, liv-

ing there was cheap, and lots of people with small incomes were profiting by the circumstance.

"It's not much use having the exchange in your favor," he would say, ruefully, "when you've nothing to get the exchange on."

But this, too, passed over her. Not to have anything on which to get the exchange would imply the elimination of letters of credit; and people always had letters of credit when they went abroad.

From his point of view, this was the flaw in all her arguments; but even here he was overborne by her superior knowledge and intensity. She knew she was right. As they came nearer to a clandestine marriage she rebuked his lack of reliance on herself. Why should he balk when she knew and he didn't know? The family to be considered was her own. There was not a detail among their varied traits with which she wasn't familiar. She could tell where they would stand firm, and also where they would yield. She could estimate what they could bear and what they couldn't bear at all. He, on his side, being ignorant of this, could only depend upon her word. When she assured him he ought, in all fairness, to feel himself assured.

She knew, and he didn't know. It was all in that, and it was not to be controverted. Since the lovely djinn had carried him to what was already a place of bliss, how could he refuse to go on trusting her? It was the plea which she herself made, and of which he could hardly help acknowledging the justice.



## *Chapter IV*

THE slow, hesitating voice ventured to lay bare a fact which had not hitherto been touched upon.

"You know, if we put this through, I shall figure as the bad man. They won't think of us as two young people who've been in love for over two years and only take this way because they can't see any other. I shall be the clever crook who's played on the affections of an inexperienced young girl, and run away with her for her money."

She looked at him with her square, straight glance. "Well, you can stand that, can't you? It'll be no worse for you than it will be for me to be held up as a fool, cheated by a rogue because he was good-looking. You'll get one kind of blame; I'll get another. That will be part of the price we have to pay; but what we'll get in return will be worth it."

They were in the one secluded spot in which they could speak freely. Theo had discovered it some eighteen months earlier, a tea-room just out of Madison Avenue in a street in the Fifties. It was a tea-room like any other, except that for half of its long narrow depth it was covered by a balcony reached by a little corkscrew stair. Only an overflow of guests would have brought anyone to this perch, and there never was any such overflow. On Saturday afternoons, when George was free, they could meet here with the least risk of discovery.

It was a Saturday on the present occasion, the Sat-

urday following the delivery of what Theo considered her ultimatum to her father. That he took it as an ultimatum she would have had no reason to doubt, had it not been for his blandness. At no time had he betrayed the recollection of having received an unusual confidence. He had divulged nothing to her mother or to the family. At the same time she could only suppose that he knew what she had told him. Were she to hesitate to act she would not only stultify herself, but jeopardize all her life's happiness. It would be true, as George had pointed out, that for years to come he would be talked of as a knave and she as an idiot, but that was unavoidable. It was the way the world would reckon, and there was nothing to do but face it. The sooner they faced it the better. Nothing would be gained by waiting, not if they waited twenty years. They must act now, while the spirit was upon them.

He listened while she made her suggestions, noting chiefly her inability to understand what was possible and not possible for him. Even now she had not grasped the fact that things which could easily be a matter of course for a man of her own world might for him be out of the question. He was to procure a motor car somewhere, and very early on a given morning draw up at the park gates at Old Tilbury. She would join him with the daylight. They could breakfast together, be married in the course of the forenoon, and by afternoon could take a train to Atlantic City or some other convenient point. After a day or two of honeymoon they would return to New York and march up to their reckoning with the family. It would be a terrible reckoning—for a few minutes. It might even last for some hours, or some days. But

in the long run the result would be the same. He would become the son of Jackson Blent, as Jackson Blent had become the son of Josiah Spencer. It would mean the kind of career for which he was fitted and had always been intended. It would mean honor, prosperity, the future. But above all it would mean that they would have each other without further cavil from anyone, and especially without this odious secrecy. Couldn't he see that it was worth fighting for?

He could see that it was worth fighting for, and that if there was bitter in the cup there was also sweet. Briefly put, his happiness would be purchased by what seemed to him a loss of honor. That is, it would be an imputed loss of honor. He would be credited with having schemed and lied in order to ensnare innocence, and would have to go through life submitting to the accusation. So be it! Since this was the price, he would pay it.

At the same time he pointed out to her that her method of procedure was for him, at any rate, not practical. Once more he laid before her the inhibitions of the man who is working for forty-five dollars a week. He must be on his job. He was not free to take two or three days for an elopement. He could be excused if ill, for some bereavement in his family, or for any other cause considered serious enough. But he couldn't take his own time off. Should he attempt to do so the fate which all men in his class dreaded more than anything in life would be hard upon him; he would be fired from his job.

In vain she insisted that the keeping or the losing of his job was of little moment in view of the change

which would take place in his fortunes. He didn't suppose, did he, that her father would let him go back to a bookkeeper's desk? He would have some such position as her brother Spen. Just what the position was she didn't know, but she could see that the work was easy and that Spen enjoyed a comfortable salary. All such considerations would adjust themselves, once they had cleared the stupendous tasks lying right ahead of them.

But in the end she accepted the plan he proposed as being the most sensible. This was a Saturday. A week from the following Monday would be Labor Day. On the Saturday preceding Labor Day, a half holiday in any case, the banks were to close, giving all their employees three free days in which to enjoy themselves. He would come off duty at four on Friday afternoon. He could meet her by five, be married by six, and by seven or eight they could take a train to Atlantic City, as she had suggested. With all Saturday and most of Sunday for their honeymoon, they could return to New York on Sunday night, so as to be free for the conflict with her family on the Monday.

Decidedly this was the thing to do, but she assented to the plan with an irritation she found difficult to analyze. When able to do this she saw it as a kind of resentment at having become dependent on a public holiday. Public holidays in her experience had been nuisances to avoid by staying in the country and entertaining guests till they were over. Business men, of course, had the day free when they didn't have every other day. But they *could* have other days when they wanted them. George Pevensey and she herself,

now that she was about to become his wife, had to fit their necessities into the number of hours they could claim by law, and could count on no more leeway. It was the first faint hint that in practice she might be entering that innumerable horde which she herself called invisible. George was in it, of course; but he was coming out of it in fact as well as in spirit. She had hoped to see him beyond its atmosphere before actually giving him her hand. But now they were to be married *within* its atmosphere, making sure of the holiday as the only time at their disposal to go before the clergyman. They would be just like thousands of other clerks and stenographers the country over. It was a humiliation. She didn't like it. It brought a chill into the air, as when, on a fine summer's day, the wind works round to the north.

At three in the afternoon on the Friday before Labor Day Theo packed the light suitcase in which she sometimes took to town a dress that was to be "done over." Her mother was lying down; Aunt Katty was out in her bath-chair; Sheila was playing tennis with Helen Allenby; the house was at its quietest. She put on a suit smart enough for any sort of duty and a not too noticeable hat.

Having made these preparations, she sat down at her desk and scribbled hastily. To scribble hastily, without thinking of her words or cast of sentences, made the task easier. It was so hard to do that unless she did it in a hurry she could not have done it at all.

DARLING PAPA:

Within a few hours I shall have done what I told you ten days ago I was going to do. Believe me this is no



hasty or ill-considered act. I have thought it over for nearly two years, and find that there is no other way. I must go with the man I love.

I feel that I have no choice. But, happy as I am in doing it, I can never be really happy till you have forgiven us and taken us to your heart. I know you will. I know that with your great big nature and overflowing affection you cannot do anything else. Dear love to mother and the rest.

To you, my adored papa, the best devotion of your little girl.

THEO.

Closing the envelope and addressing it with the single word, *Papa*, she slipped into her father's room and left the missive on the dressing table. Then she gave orders that one of the chauffeurs should drive her to the station for the four-o'clock train. All this she did tearfully, but she did it trustfully, sure that by Monday, or some day very soon, the storm would be weathered.

The four-o'clock train took her into the Pennsylvania Station in something like three-quarters of an hour. Carrying her suitcase, like scores of other girls, she made her way into the great lobby, as vast as the vastest *atrium* in the palace of the Cæsars. There at the appointed trysting-place stood George. He too had a suitcase, but her quick eye noticed that it was one which had seen hard usage. For an elopement, she thought, he might have bought a new one.

He limped toward her the minute he saw her in the crowd—a big, sunny berserker, blue-eyed and magnificent. In ancient times one of his strength and stature would have been wielding a battle ax and shouting songs of victory. Putting both her hands into his, she looked up at him in surrender.

"Here I am, George. I've come. Take me. I'm ready to go anywhere."

He smiled twice. The first smile was the bright one of rapturous amazement that this thing could have happened; but that went out. The second was slow and wistful, disappearing in a doubtful gleam. Accustomed to his lack of words, Theo spoke again, with eager promptness.

"Now where do we go? You said it would be near."

"Yes, it's quite near." Taking up both suitcases in one hand, he had the other free for the stick by which he helped himself along. "Let's go in here for a minute first."

Out of the *atrium* he led the way into a waiting room dark, crowded, and bathed in the special abjectness which emanates from people waiting for their trains. Picking their way between small baggage clattering the floor, between restless children, between men and women at the lowest ebb of their vitality, they found in a corner created by the angle of two walls a spot sufficiently protected to allow of private speech. Having placed the suitcases on the floor, he begged her to take a seat. She did this wonderingly.

"But don't we have to go to him right off? I thought he was to be waiting for us."

"Oh yes; he's waiting."

"Well, then, what is it? You've got the license, haven't you?"

He nodded that he had the license.

"And the ring?"

He nodded that he had the ring.

"Then what can it be?"

The hesitation in his speech was only part of his general air of perplexity. "I—I—tho—thought, Theo darling, you might like to—to think it over again."

Her great eyes blazed. "Think it over again! Why, George, what can you mean? What have we been doing but thinking it over for the last two years?"

"Yes, but now that we're right up against it—"

"Well, what?"

He had difficulty with his speech again. "It's—it's your father. I don't believe he'll come around. I don't believe he'll accept me."

In her tone there was both reason and exasperation. "George dear, if you'd only admit that I know my own father better than you can possibly—"

"That's right, too; but suppose he didn't?"

"We won't suppose it. There's no use supposing it. I know what my own father is capable of doing and what he's not capable of doing. If you'd only leave it to me—"

"But, Theo, if I leave it to you and we find that you're mistaken, do you think you could live on my forty-five a week?"

Springing to her feet and picking up her suitcase, she made toward the door leading into the great lobby. Her movement was so quick and unexpected that she was already lost in the crowd before he could hobble after her. When he made out her figure she was pressing in among a queue of people making their way downstairs toward a train. Only the fact that she had no ticket excluded her and sent her back. Having looked at the sign which gave the destination of the train and seen that it was Philadelphia, she hurried to a window where such tickets were being

sold. It was only here that Pevensey intercepted her.

"Theo, in the name of God, what do you mean? That train goes to Philadelphia."

"I don't care where it goes. I'll go wherever it'll take me. I left them a note before I left home to say I was going away to be married. Married or single, I'm not going back. Neither will I discuss again questions which we've settled and resettled a hundred times within the last eighteen months. Since you're afraid to marry me, don't. I'll learn how to live without you. But I'm not going home after what I told my father ten days ago, and the note I've just written him." She held out her hand. "Good-by. Don't be worried on my account. I've got a little money and can take care of myself. If you're afraid, I'm not."

He faltered helplessly. "I'm only afraid of one thing, and that's seeing that you've made a wrong calculation and must live on what I can afford to give you."

She tossed her head. "And that's the whole thing. So long as you're afraid of that there's no going forward."

And yet they did go forward. Having reached the point at which they found themselves, they finally agreed that there was no retreat. They arrived at the church a little late, but the clergyman had not yet given them up. At Theo's request the ceremony took place within the church itself, with the sexton and the rector's lady-secretary for witnesses. Though she didn't know why, she felt that it took some of its ugliness from a runaway match to have the service solemnized before the altar, shadowed by the dusk already gathering outside, and sanctified by imme-

morial mysteries. Its withdrawal into darkness was lighted by an angel in the window above, a radiant figure in a crimson robe descending on wings of fire.

"I, George William, take thee, Theodosia Spencer, to be my wedded wife—"

"I, Theodosia Spencer, take thee, George William, to be my wedded husband—"

"For as much as George William and Theodosia Spencer have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth, each to the other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving a ring and by joining hands, I pronounce that they are man and wife, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

It was done. They were man and wife. They were man and wife in all the solemnity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The full seal had been set on this unity. As an outward emblem, Theo had her ring, the symbol of completeness and eternity.

Back again in the throng of the streets, each was too overawed to speak except about the commonplace. He named the hour of the train on which he had reserved their seats for Atlantic City. Having time to catch it easily, they went back toward the station on foot.

There Theo stopped to send a telegram. George stood behind her while she wrote.

She threw the question over her shoulder. "Where do we stay at Atlantic City?"

"I've made reservations at the Paymore."

The Paymore! The address was the best possible. It would show them at least that their background



would not be without dignity. A half smile quivered on her lips as she wrote. The address was her father's.

Married this afternoon. To-morrow and next day at the Paymore, Atlantic City. Almost ideally happy. Shall be wholly so when you and mother have forgiven us.

THEO PEVENSEY.

## *Chapter V*

HANNAH was the butler, but he was more than that. He was the old retainer who knows the history of the family better than they do themselves. As a slim young Englishman he had gone into the service of Mr. Josiah Spencer in the capacity of footman. That had been in the days when Miss Katty and Miss Lavinia had been mistresses of the house, and Miss Augusta the young lady. Of all that had happened since that time his mind was a record as faithful as the yellowing files of an old newspaper. If you wanted to know anything you looked him up, you turned his pages. Where there was a difference of opinion as to dates or personalities between Miss Katty and himself, Hannah was generally right, though Miss Katty screeched him down.

It was he who had opened the door to Miss Augusta and Jackson Blent when they had come back to confess their marriage. He had heard the oaths and curses of the father as he threatened to turn the young couple out of doors; he had heard the wild cries of the two older women, "Kill him! Kill him!"; he had heard Miss Augusta's weeping; and he had learned at one time or another, from each of the company in turn, that during this scene the young bridegroom had stood calm and impassive, waiting for the storm to blow over. He, the young bridegroom, had remained to lunch, and Hannah had served at table.

The event had marked an epoch. It had marked, above all, the swinging of Hannah's loyalty from the old employers to the younger ones. He liked Jackson Blent. He liked the quiet force with which he held his own amid these noisy, turbulent Spencers. He liked the sure, determined way in which he gradually got the upper hand, bringing even the termagant old sisters into submission. As for Josiah Spencer himself, there was no more spirit left in him. From year to year he handed over to his son-in-law more and more of the authority, till, as Miss Katty had put it, he himself became as docile as a rabbit in a hutch.

When the young couple had gone to housekeeping, Hannah, by a friendly family arrangement, had gone with them. He had then been promoted to be butler, with further duties in the way of valeting his master. He admired the way in which Jackson Blent, who had always brushed his own clothes and blacked his own boots, took to this enlargement of his dignity. Got natural style, Mr. Blent has, Hannah declared in the kitchen. Son of a liveryman as he may be, he knows what's what better than some as has been born in the purple, not nymin' no nymes. As one man will side with another, with reason or without, his sympathies had gone with Jackson Blent even when Miss Augusta learned that she had been married for her money. What else could she have been married for? Surely she hadn't supposed that she could have been married for herself! Lucky she was to have the cash, since it had brought her a handsome husband. As plainly as he dared he expressed this opinion to Miss Augusta herself, helping her to see her situation as not without its advantages.

So as they grew older together Jackson Blent had

come to take Hannah's services as he took his own arm or leg, as something of which the strength belonged to him and that he would find it hard to do without. Hannah, on the other hand, developed a sense of proprietorship in Jackson Blent, with authority over the clothes he wore, the medicines he took, the times of his rising and going to bed, as well as his smaller comings and goings within the house. On the afternoon of the day on which Theo had gone away he was laying out what he called the No. 3 dinner-jacket suit—not the second-best, but older than the second-best, though good enough for a mere family occasion—when he saw the note Theo had left, just where she had left it.

Later he described his sensation as "a turn." He furthermore said that something told him. As a matter of fact he knew that Miss Theo was late in coming home, and that Mrs. Blent had been asking about her. And here was a note in Miss Theo's hand, with the simple inscription, *Papa!* Hannah's premonitions frightened him.

For those premonitions dated from a good many months back. Mr. and Mrs. Tremlett had "noticed things," as long as two years ago. Miss Theo made mysterious trips to town nearly every Saturday afternoon, and, though the family, with its indifference as to one another's doings, was not disturbed by the fact, a close observer like Hannah could hardly fail to register the data. He registered other data, too, not in a co-ordinated way, or in any way that led him to form a theory, but only with a force sufficient to give him a turn when the crisis seemed to be approaching. Something told him.

It told him, too, to let his master get halfway into

his evening clothes before he made the discovery of the letter on which the word *Papa* shone balefully. It was part of what Hannah liked in Jackson Blent that he was particular about his evening toilet, as about all other conventions and formalities. Mrs. Blent was the opposite of this. "Dressy" in her own person, she was otherwise slipshod and unobservant. Dinner might be served anyhow and she wouldn't notice it. If there was a dinner party, it was Blent who talked over with Hannah the succession of plates to be used for the various courses, the old Spode for the serving plates, the Royal Berlin for the soup, the armorial East India Lowestoft for the fish, and so on, and so on, till they came to Blent's special pride, the dessert service of old Rockingham. Mrs. Blent's special pride was a dessert service of brand-new white and gold which she herself had purchased right out of the shop window at Callendar & Black's in Fifth Avenue. It made the table look like a show-case, Blent declared, banishing it to a distant shelf, and charging Hannah not to take it down till it had mellowed for a hundred years.

These details, according to Hannah, showed the root-divergencies between the husband and the wife, —the one born to all the refinements, and yet no more able to appreciate them than a cat to enjoy a cocktail, while the other, brought up among stableboys and under the hoofs of horses, possessed of instinctive taste.

"Must 'ave had tyste in his crydle. Now tyste was somethink poor Miss Augusta didn't know anythink about, not no more than a monkey'd know about a book o' poetry you'd 'anded 'im into 'is cyge. Syme with all them Spencers, always a-hollerin' and a-ram-



pygin' about the 'ouse, and everythink every which wye."

Beyond a point Hannah was unable to protect his hero against whatever news awaited him. That point was reached when, dressed except for his waistcoat and coat, the hero turned to the mirror to brush his great shock of iron-gray hair.

"Why, 'ere's a letter for you, sir, right on the dressin'-tyble where it 'ad got knocked aside. Looks as if it was Miss Theo's 'and-writin', but you'll know when you read it."

Blent had wheeled round sharply, as if something had also told him. So as not to see the blow fall, Hannah buried himself in the clothes closet. He was smothering there when he heard a groan and something like a thud. On reading the first words Blent had apparently sat down on the bed, perhaps with a sudden sense of weakness, and from there had slipped to the floor. He was on the floor when Hannah reached him, his head against the bed, his hands clutching at the counterpane.

He was not unconscious. "The drops! The drops! I'm all right. This'll pass. Give me the drops. Quick, damn you, quick!"

The drops produced their effect. Within five minutes he was in an armchair, a little redder, with a tendency to splutter and to choke, but otherwise, as far as one could see, none the worse for the shock he had received. When the first dinner gong sounded he stood up to put on his remaining garments, speaking over his shoulder to Hannah, who held them out.

"If Miss Theo's place is laid for dinner, take it away. Don't lay it any more—not till—not till she comes back." He turned at the door as he went out.

"And don't say to anyone—not to anyone—that I've had this little upset."

Hannah admired the nerve of the man who had possibly got his death blow, and yet held his head high, and carried himself calmly, in going down to face his family.

As he was late, they were all assembled in the living room, Mrs. Blent, Sheila, and Spen. Spen, a tall, slim, weedy young man, lolled in an armchair, his long legs crossed, as he smoked a cigarette. Mrs. Blent hustled forward to meet her husband, who came down the three shallow steps by which you descended into the living room from the main part of the house.

"Jackson, have you any idea where Theo is? She took the four-o'clock train to New York this afternoon, and she hasn't come back, nor left a word with anyone."

He preserved the stony calm of a granite mountain. "Yes, she left a word for me. I'm going to tell you what she said. But I want you all to take it as I'm taking it, because it'll be a shock to you. The only way to bear a shock is to bear it quietly."

Mrs. Blent exclaimed under her breath, "Mercy!" Sheila pressed close to him. "Papa, what can it be?" Spen untwisted his long legs and, with his cigarette smoking between his fingers, stood up to confront his father and take the news.

Blent's self-control gave force to the carrying power of his syllables. "Theo has gone away to be married. She's probably married now."

Mrs. Blent dropped into the nearest chair. Sheila was the only one who spoke. "Married, papa? But who to? She hasn't been engaged to anyone—not since Herby Graeme, and that was ever so long ago."

"I'll tell you that in a minute; but there's something I want to say first. Theo hasn't done anything but what she has a right to do. We must concede that to her, and be just. When anyone is wholly within his or her rights—"

Spen sniffed. "Their legal rights."

"Legal rights are the summing up of all rights. We only put ourselves in the wrong when we deny it. I told Theo—"

Mrs. Blent leaned forward tensely. "Then you knew about it?"

"I did—and I didn't."

"And you never told me?"

"I thought I'd squelched the whole thing. I told her she wasn't to do it, that she wasn't to think of it. I took it for granted that that would put an end to it."

She uttered a cry of protest and upbraiding. "Put an end to it with Theo! Don't you know that that's the very way to drive her into it?"

"I supposed she'd obey me."

"Supposed she'd obey you? Has she ever obeyed you? Hasn't she made you jig to her whistle ever since she's been a child? The rest of us have obeyed you; but Theo—"

Sheila danced in her excitement. "Yes, but, mother darling! Papa hasn't told us who she's married to. That's what we want to know. Isn't it, Spen?"

"I'm not crazy to hear. Since she's run away to do it, I suppose she's married a bounder."

"It's a man named Pevensey."

Mrs. Blent was bewildered. "I never heard the name in my life. Where could she have met him?"

"Oh yes, mother darling," Sheila reminded her.

"Pevensey was the name of that nice hero-man who was down here two years ago for his convalescence. Don't you remember? We put him to live with the Tremletts."

"That's the man," Blent stated, briefly.

"He's a dear," Sheila informed them. "We'll all love him."

Mrs. Blent brought her memories together. "But wasn't he only a clerk, or something—"

"He's a bookkeeper. I think he earns forty-five dollars a week."

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" the mother moaned. "Theo, that we were all so proud of. Poor, misguided, head-strong girl! This is the end of the world to me."

"Oh no, it isn't," Blent insisted.

Sheila broke in, ardently, "Because papa will take him and make him rich, just as your father took papa—"

It was at such a minute that Blent knew how to intervene, with as little forcing of the note as possible. "Which brings me to tell you the terms I laid down to Theo—"

"And you never said a word to me," the mother moaned. "I might have stopped the whole thing."

Blent went on as if there had been no interruption. "The terms I laid down to Theo, and which she understands perfectly. I didn't question her right to marry the man; only, *if* she married him, she was to cease to be one of us. She wouldn't know us; we shouldn't know her. But if, on the other hand, she ceased to be married to the fellow—divorce, or anything like that—she could come back to us and find her place here, just as it's always been. In the meanwhile—"

"Oh, if you'd only told me! It was wicked to keep me in the dark, when it was my own child."

Blent continued, imperturbably: "In the meanwhile—for us—Theo has just been—been blotted out—for a while. We won't—we won't mourn her, because she'll soon be back. The stiffer the upper lip we keep the sooner she'll be driven home. It's just a question of time. She'll have learned her lesson—"

Mrs. Blent buried her face in her hands. "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

"Now none of that, Augusta. I feel it as much as you do, but I take it as my duty to the rest of you not to show it more than I can help. That's what we must all do. We must do it for one another. We're going in to dinner, and we'll eat it as we always do. After dinner we'll play bridge. We'll go to bed and sleep. No fretting that we can keep up will help Theo, or do any of us any good; so let that be the idea."

Hannah waddled to the top of the steps to announce that dinner was served. With no further protest than a long tearful sigh Mrs. Blent took the lead. Blent followed her, while Spen and Sheila came last, whispering together.

"What did father mean," the girl asked of her brother, "by saying that Theo wouldn't be one of us any more? Whatever he says, she'll be one of me. I shan't—"

"You'd better do as you're told, or you'll get into trouble."

"I'd rather get into trouble than turn my back on Theo. Besides, papa wouldn't do it himself. You'll see. He'll take him into partnership, or whatever it is, just as Grandfather Spencer took him."



"Not if I know it. This thing'll dish me with Helen. The Allenbys won't stand for it."

But Sheila knew better. "Why, Helen won't mind! She'll think it fun. Besides, I never can see that they're such awful snobs as you and papa make out."

## *Chapter VI*

THROUGHOUT Sunday the family at Blentwood kept up their stoic attitude. Mrs. Blent and Sheila went to church; Spen played golf; Blent, wearing the tweed knickerbockers of an English country gentleman, tramped about his farm or hobnobbed with his neighbor Allenby, whose property marched with his own. He made no mention of Theo to any of the family, and only Sheila and her mother talked about her in scared whispers.

"Mother darling, we must simply make papa accept George Pevensey, just as your father did him."

"Yes, dear, if he will. But if Theo can't make him, we can't. She's the only one who's ever been able to bring him round to what he didn't want to do."

The question as to who would tell Aunt Katty was solved by putting the task on Sheila. "I won't do it," Blent had said; while Mrs. Blent had responded, "Well, you can't expect me to."

It was plain that each dreaded the resurrection of the past which would be Aunt Katty's objective. As it was, she could only whoop out her cockatoo laugh at Sheila's information, with cries of: "Chickens to roost! Chickens to roost!" which could be heard all over the house.

That something would happen on the following day was more or less in the minds of all the family. For this very reason no one spoke of it. After breakfast on Labor Day each sped away on any errand he

could think of. Miss Katty alone was determined to be early on the scene, descending to the living room at an hour at which she had generally no more than breakfasted. At the tapping of her stick on the floor of the hall Sheila, who was preparing the vases for new supplies of flowers, fled by one of the open French windows.

"Don't pull me, you bonehead! I can walk."

"I thought you was in a hurry, Miss Katty," Hannah murmured, apologetically.

"So I am, but I don't want to break my neck before getting there. There'll be fun here this morning. I want a box for the show."

Hannah steered her down the steps and over the rugs of the slippery floor. "You think the elopin' couple'll turn up, miss?"

"You can bet your life they will. What time does the morning train stop at Old Tilbury?"

"There's one due at eleven twenty-five, but them Long Island trains is always behind time, especially on public 'olidays."

"What time is it now?"

"It's about half past eleven, miss."

"That'll just give 'em time to walk from the station. I bet they'll be here in another five minutes. Don't the family expect 'em?"

"They make out as they don't, Miss Katty."

Miss Katty's winged chair was so placed near the open window that not only could she command the gardens and what was passing there, but no one could go in or out without giving her the chance to snap at him. Three French windows gave on the large semicircular terrace, and of these only one was ajar. The room was so large that a grand piano was a mere

detail in a corner. Behind it a victrola, discreetly out of sight, was useful for grinding out jazz for impromptu dances. Sofas and deeply upholstered chairs were covered for the summer in flowered linen slips. One or two writing desks were placed where the light was good, while on the side of the room opposite to Miss Katty stood a long Queen Anne table on which papers and magazines were carefully arranged in overlapping rows. It was a room of expensive comfort, lacking only books. The Blents were not a reading family. When not out-of-doors, riding, driving, golfing, playing tennis, or pottering about the farm and garden, they played bridge. If not numerous enough to play bridge, they played solitaire. Life itself being but an open book, teeming with information on every page, they felt no need of second-hand aids for understanding it. They lived; in their own sense of living they lived richly and fully. In extending or enhancing their advantages reading would have been of no help to them, since their own experience was so plenteous.

Miss Katty being settled in her armchair, Hannah laid the morning paper on a small table within easy reach of her. She barked, as she put on her horn spectacles to look at the headlines on the front page:

"Where's Mr. Blent?"

"Gone down to the farm, miss, to look at the new calf."

"And Mrs. Blent?"

"The last I see of her she was in the kitchen garding."

"And I suppose Mr. Spencer is off to play golf."

"Them's his clubs, miss." He pointed to a bag of

clubs leaning against an armchair. "He'll most likely be goin' soon."

"Are they trying to make out that they don't feel it?"

"Mr. Blent's orders is that everythink is to go on as usual, just as if there'd been no family disgrace."

Miss Katty threw back her head, with her loud cackling laugh. "So he called it a disgrace, did he? That's a good un. Did he know that *we* called it a disgrace when my niece ran away with *him*? Now when somebody else, that's just as good as he ever was, runs away with *his* daughter he calls it a disgrace. How I wish Lavinia could know! I believe her angel face is looking down from heaven at this minute, taking it all in. Laugh, Hannah, you sap-head! This must be as great a day for you as it is for me."

With her bright colors, her jewels, her bracelets, and her strings of pearls, above all with the deep touch of rouge on her cheeks, she was as much like some wicked old tropical bird as her cockatoo laugh suggested. That Hannah disapproved of her, that he took no share in her mirth over the Blent calamity, was plain from his mournful, unresponding countenance. Having asked if there was anything more that he could do for her, he was about to withdraw when a movement of the portières at the back of the room arrested his attention. The portières were great gold-colored tapestried things from Albert Herter's looms, and between them he was sure that somebody had peeped. It couldn't be Miss Sheila because she was in the garden picking flowers. Nobody else would make this undignified approach unless it was Miss Theo.



As a matter of fact, the portières parted fully and Theo stood holding each of the curtains by a hand. She seemed to be scouting, to see which of the family she would first have to encounter. Finding only Hannah and Aunt Katty, she nodded to some one behind her and drew George Pevensey into view. It was easy to note that they were scared, and also that they were eager. She held him by the hand till they were down the steps on the main level of the room.

Theo was glad that the first touch with home should be by way of her aged relative. Aunt Katty wouldn't be gracious, but the thin edge of the wedge would more easily go in where the tie of love was weakest. She whispered to George: "That's Aunt Katty, mother's aunt, our greataunt. You must have seen her when you were down here two years ago."

He nodded, and she led him forward. "Aunt Katty, this is my husband, George Pevensey. We were married last Friday afternoon."

Miss Katty took off her horn spectacles for better inspection, eying the young man from head to foot, as if appraising a possible new purchase. Knowing that this was but the beginning of his ordeal, George stood his ground as best he could, smiling shyly and coloring to the eyes.

"I remember you," Miss Katty said at last. "You were the hero. Awful keen on heroes Jackson Blent was for a spell. Always thought you looked stupid. Good-looking enough, I suppose, for anyone that likes that big brainless style; but I wouldn't fall for you, not unless I was harder up for a man than I've ever been yet."

Theo tried to laugh. "We don't mind Aunt Katty, you know, George—"

"No; but you've got to put up with me. When it comes to money, I can buy and sell you all." She relapsed into one of the abstracted moods of very old age, gazing off sightlessly. "But it don't matter; it don't matter. Everyone gets over everything."

Theo turned to Hannah, who stood in the center of the room in nervous perturbation. George took up his stand behind the long table, picking up a magazine, putting it down again, picking up another and putting that down, consciously an intruder in this great house, unwelcome to everyone. Hannah spoke out of the depths of his own discomfort.

"I'll just run and tell the family, Miss Theo, that you and—and the young gent is 'ere."

Theo seized him by the arm to detain him for a minute more. "Oh, Hannah, what do they all think about it?"

Hannah fidgeted, trying to get away. "Well, I couldn't rightly sye, miss."

"But you must know."

"I've rose to my position, Miss Theo, by never knowing nothink that might be beyond my stytion."

"Oh, Hannah, you frighten me! If you don't tell me, when I know you know, you'll make me think they didn't like it."

"Well, 'ardly no one don't like a runaway match, Miss Theo."

Miss Katty interrupted loudly and sententiously, as if speaking in a trance. "They'll get over it. Everyone gets over everything."

Theo caught at the idea. "You hear that, Hannah! Father ran away with mother, and they got over that."

Hannah shifted his ground. "It's the master's 'ealth, miss. 'E ain't in a styte to stand a shock."

"Oh, but this couldn't have been a shock! It's two weeks ago now since I told him—"

"But he never thought you'd do it, miss."

"And he admired Mr. Pevensey so much. Had him down here when he came back wounded from the war—"

"We all likes a 'ero, miss, till we gets fed up with 'em." He began to edge away. "But I must 'unt up the family, Miss Theo, before they gets scattered."

As Hannah went out through the gold-colored portières a man's voice, slightly out of tune, was announcing that there was a long, long trail a-winding, just outside the French window. Theo had only time to whisper across the table to George:

"That's my brother Spen. You see him every day at the bank. He'll be the worst, but we must face him."

Spen, still singing out of tune, came in by the French window and flung a word in passing to his aunt: "Hello, Aunt Katty! Come and take a turn round the links." In crossing the room toward his clubs he caught sight of Theo and stopped. "Ho, ho! *You* here?"

Theo made a little bow of mockery. "Yes, Spencer, *I'm* here. *We're* here." She waved her hand toward George. "This is my husband, Mr. Pevensey. You must have met before."

Behind the barrier of the long table George drew himself up, ready for any kind of reception. But what he didn't look for was no reception at all. Spen did not so much as glance at him. Screwing his weak face to an expression of severity, he kept his eyes on his sister.

His voice was high, with a crack in it when he

grew excited. "Do you mean to say that you've had the effrontery to bring—?"

In Theo's contralto there was a dangerous self-control. "Spen dear, just be careful of your words, will you?"

"I shall be careful of my words when you've become careful of your acts."

"I've been very careful of my acts. I've done nothing but what I told father I'd do—"

"All I know is that since he's got the news of it—well, it's been just touch and go with him."

Theo's manner changed to sudden anxiety. "Oh, but, Spen, he isn't ill, is he?"

"I'm not going to tell you what he is. You don't deserve to know. How much did you think about his being ill when you went off—?"

"He wasn't ill then."

"He's always ill. You know as well as I do that with a heart like his a very little shock might kill him. But you wouldn't care if it did."

"Whether I'd care or not isn't your business."

"Isn't my business"—he picked up his clubs as if to go away—"when you bring disgrace on the whole family?"

"I must ask you again, Spen, to be careful of your words. One of these days—"

"One of these days, and some day very soon, you'll be ready to take poison to think you've been such a fool."

"If it's being such a fool to marry the man I love, as my mother did before me—"

"Ah, cut out the high-falutin'. What your mother did before you we can't help. But don't you see that it's made a difference—to *us*?"

Theo's fine eyebrows went up in surprise. "A difference to us?"

"Sure a difference to us. Look here! Let's talk facts. How do you think we stand—socially, I mean here in Old Tilbury?"

She made a disdainful gesture. "I don't care anything about all that."

"Bunk!"

"I never did care anything for social position."

"Ah, go on! You wouldn't be an American if social position wasn't in the back of your mind first, last, and all the time. We can deny it till we choke, and we'll still be trying to creep higher up, you as well as the rest of us. If that's the case—and I'm talking facts—we've got to take warning by what mother did to us."

Theo was frankly puzzled. "What mother did to us?"

"Just beginning to live it down, after nearly thirty years. When the daughter of a man whom everybody *recognized*—"

"Ran away with a bookkeeper in her father's bank. That's it, isn't it?"

"No! Ran away with a bookkeeper whose father kept a livery stable right under everybody's nose. That's been the trouble with father. He married mother. He made money. He pegged his way up. He got to be president of the Hudson River Trust, known to everyone in Wall Street. And yet, in spite of all that, here in Old Tilbury, which you might call a testing tube of everything social in the United States—"

Theo held her head haughtily. "Here in Old Tilbury his position is very good."



"Very good, but not the best. Listen here! We've got a big place. We're members of the best country clubs. We know some of the right people. But up till lately we haven't known the right people in the right way. We've known them as neighbors, but not as friends. See the difference?"

She snapped her fingers. "I don't care that about your difference."

"You bet you do. That's only bull. You've felt it as much as I have that the right people have only nodded to us in country clubs, or grinned at us in coming out of church, or asked mother to be patroness of their charity things because she has the cash. But the right people were *getting* to do more. They'd begun asking us to tennis on their private courts, to lunches and teas, to dinners and dances. Little by little we'd have got back into the big American front row in which mother lost her place when she ran away with dad—"

"Spen, how dare you?"

But Spen went on serenely: "In which mother lost her place when she ran away with dad, and that dad's been working all his life to win back for her. And now because *you*—because you've married *that*—"

As George started forward with a smothered exclamation, Theo put up her hand to keep him back. "George dear, keep quiet. Let me manage it."

Feeling himself safe, Spen repeated: "And now because you've married *that*, you've gone and queered all father's game."

Again Pevensey was about to burst his restrictions. "But—but—"

With his inarticulate helplessness he had got no

further when Sheila ran in through the open French window. Rushing to Theo, she threw herself into her arms.

"Oh, Theo! What were you married in? You didn't take a thing but the dress you've got on."

"I'll tell you about that later, dear," Theo said, releasing herself gently. "Just now I want you to shake hands with your new brother, George. George, this is my little sister, Sheila. I think you must know her already."

Demurely Sheila went round the end of the table and shook hands with her new relative. "Yes, we used to see each other when you were down here staying with the Tremletts."

Aunt Katty, who had been forgotten, began to croak again. "Great man your father was for wounded soldiers in those days. As he didn't have a son fit to go and fight—"

Spen threw down his clubs and strode to the winged chair. "See here, Aunt Katty! Just cut that out, will you?"

Aunt Katty only whooped. "Well, did he have a son fit to go and fight? I thought you folded bandages for the Red Cross."

"Now let's talk facts, Aunt Katty. You know as well as I do that I was ready to go and fight—"

"And they wouldn't have you. Bless your soul, Spen, I don't blame you. If the Lord made you a Miss Nancy it isn't your fault that you can't be a man."

Spen picked up his clubs again, muttering to himself: "Damned old lunatic! Ought to be in her grave."

Theo went toward her aunt, trying to make peace. "Spen did the best he could, Aunt Katty dear—"

But Aunt Katty only pointed with her horn spectacles at George. "Where's he taken you to live?"

"Just for now a little hotel."

"Cheap, I suppose."

Theo did her best to bluff. "Oh, not so very."

"Hm! Well, I'll come and see."

The bride and groom exchanged embarrassed glances. "That'll be lovely, Aunt Katty. In a few days' time, when we get settled, I'll let you know."

"Oh, I'll come before you get settled. I bet it's no better than a dog-hole." She pointed to a desk. "Go over there and write the address. I don't believe he's worth a cent."

Making another start as if to speak, George was silenced again by Mrs. Blent's appearance between the portières, where she stood for a second, looking on.

"You're quite wrong, Aunt Katty," Theo corrected, as she handed her aunt the address. "We stayed at the Paymore in Atlantic City, and you know what that means when it comes to spending money."

Mrs. Blent bustled forward with a cry, "Theo!"

"Mother!"

While mother and daughter clasped each other, Sheila danced round them, tugging at her mother's dress.

"Oh, mumsie dear, do make Theo tell us how she got married. We haven't heard a thing."

Mrs. Blent threw up her hands. "Oh dear! Oh dear! It's all so unappetizing. I don't believe I could listen to a thing about it."

Miss Katty's croak was delivered like the utterance of an oracle. "You'll get over it, just as your

own father did. Everyone gets over everything. It don't matter."

"But, mother," Sheila insisted, "we've got to know sometime. All we've had yet is her telegram, just saying she was married."

"Oh dear! Oh dear! And the plans I'd made for her wedding day. Theo darling, there's not been an hour since you were born that I haven't had the model for your wedding gown in the back of my mind—and now! . . . Sheila, please don't pull on me. You'll get my blouse all out of shape. I made sure that if long trains for brides were still in fashion we'd work in that piece of old lace—belonged to Catherine of Aragon they told us when we bought it—and now it's all so unappetizing that I don't know what—"

Mrs. Blent holding her lament in suspense, Theo went toward George, to take him by the arm and lead him forward. At the same time Spen threw himself into an armchair, his back to the company, as if dismissing the whole affair from his mind. Having lighted a cigarette, he tossed the match into a scrap basket.

"Mother, this is my husband—"

But Mrs. Blent turned away tearfully. "Yes, dear. I'll look at him later. Just now I couldn't bear it."

"I should think, Theo," Spen threw over his shoulder in superior style, "that if you could spare your mother any pain—"

"She didn't spare her father any pain," came from Aunt Katty, "when she brought home Jackson Blent."

Mrs. Blent whimpered on. "And the house linen I've got put away for you, all embroidered with your initials—" Seeing Spen knock off the ash of his cigarette into the scrap basket, she picked up an ash

tray and crossed the room to put it beside him. "Spen darling, do use the ash tray. You'll set fire to the house." Returning to the center of the room, she dropped into a chair. "And now I suppose you'll only have one of those city apartments, as poky as a cabin on board ship—"

Theo sat down to discuss this subject with her mother. "You don't have to start out with a great big house like this."

"Not a great big house like this, but an establishment of some sort, however modest. . . . Darling, I do wish you could learn to sit like a lady. If girls only knew how unappetizing their legs can look, especially to men—"

Theo changed her position. "Oh, mother, don't worry about that. Tell me about father. Was he cross?"

"Cross is not the word, dear. He nearly had a shock, and you know what a shock might mean to him, with his heart—"

"With his temper, with his arrogance," Aunt Katty shrieked. "Temper and arrogance 'll kill him one of these days and then you'll be saying that God called him home."

"Your father has hardly said a thing, dear; but he'll be here in a minute—"

"Oh, mother," Sheila broke in, at the end of her patience, "do make Theo tell us where she got married and what she wore!"

"What could I wear, Sheila dear, but what I've got on? It was all I took away with me, and that little old suitcase."

"Yes, but where did you go?"

While Theo gave the details of the ceremony and



the honeymoon which she knew her mother and Sheila were longing to know, George stood behind the long table, feeling strangely superfluous. The whole thing seemed a family affair among the Blents. He himself scarcely counted. He was not to be reckoned with. Even Theo felt that she could best manage the situation by being herself the protagonist and leaving him in the background. As nearly as possible he was ignored. Spen sat with his back to him. Miss Katty, when she did anything, scanned the morning paper. The three women, of whom one was his wife, had their heads together to hear or to tell the points of an episode in which his part was scarcely worth referring to. By a strong effort of the will he choked back his anger, knowing that if he had to speak anger would only strangle him. Unless he could keep cool, or unless he spoke from that sheer passionate emotion which always supplied him with words, he would only make himself ridiculous. Schooling himself to be calm, he prayed in his desperate inarticulate way that he might be able to make use of his opportunity when it came.

## Chapter VII

A DOOR slammed in the distance. There was a noise of puffing in the hall. Some one was refusing to be relieved of his hat and stick.

"Hannah, get out of my way, for God's sake!"

While Theo rose to meet her great crisis, Mrs. Blent whispered: "Here's your father, dear. Do be careful. The least little excitement, the doctor says, might easily—"

Blent pulled aside the portières, making the rings rattle against one another. In his Harris tweeds he was distinctly the city man who on Sundays and holidays likes to be the country gentleman supervising his estate. Red in the face, almost apoplectic, he descended the three steps carefully, and went straight to his favorite big chair. He looked at no one in particular, not even at Theo. Sinking heavily into his chair, he took off his Panama, throwing it on the floor on one side of him, and dropping his stick on the other. While he was getting his breath Theo took her place beside George, slipping her arm through his protectingly.

Mrs. Blent's solicitude betrayed itself fussily. "Sheila, bring your father that footstool."

He kicked it away while Sheila was placing it. "Don't want it." As Mrs. Blent stuffed a cushion at his back he pulled it out and threw it on the floor. "Take that thing away."

Putting the cushion back on the sofa whence she

had taken it, Mrs. Blent was still alert. "Sheila, pick up your father's hat and stick. This room looks like a pigsty."

"Leave them alone," he commanded. "Only staying a few minutes. Came in to see Theo. Where is she?" Looking over at her for the first time, he said, tenderly and rather sadly, "Come here."

Sighing and moaning, Mrs. Blent sank into a chair, Sheila perching on the arm of it in order to give comfort. Leaving George, who continued to stand behind the barrier of the table, Theo came slowly to her father, standing before him like a culprit, yet ready to defend her husband and her act.

Blent spoke with a kind of yearning gentleness. "What made you come back?"

"To see if you'd forgiven me."

"I've nothing to forgive."

Theo's face lighted up. "Oh, but I thought—"

"You'd a right to do what you've done. I told you so the other evening."

"The other evening you said—"

"That you were of age and your own mistress. I said that you'd a legal right to marry this man, only that if you did we should all have to abide by the conditions."

"But the conditions you made then were that—"

"That if you married him—"

She broke in proudly, "Which I've done."

"Then so long as you remain married to him—"

"It would be as if I'd never been your daughter."

Blent's voice was still gentler. "Exactly."

"But, father, I *must* remain married to him."

"That's the reason I asked you why you'd come back."

"I came back because I couldn't believe—"

"That I meant what I said. Well, now you see I did."

"Oh, but you can't mean it. I am your daughter. I can never be anything else."

"I didn't say you'd be anything else. I said it would be as *if* you hadn't been my daughter. But it's always within your power to get back your position. The day you leave him for good—so that you can become free again—"

"But how *can* I leave him for good—and become free again? I've married him. I love him."

"That's entirely your own affair, dear. If you can't leave him—you leave us."

Sheila cried out promptly: "You don't leave me, Theo. I'll stand by you whatever anybody says."

"Thank you, darling! God bless you for saying it!" She turned again to her father. "But, father, we've only done what you and mother did thirty years ago."

Miss Katty's cackle of a laugh almost amounted to a scream. "And that's what gets his goat. You've made him feel the way he made your grandfather feel. He'll never pardon you for that."

"And with you and mother," Theo went on, pleadingly, "it worked out all right."

"Oh, did it?" whooped Aunt Katty. "Much you know!"

Blent turned on the old woman savagely. "If you know anything, speak out."

"All I know is what I've heard, Jackson, that no man works so hard for his money as the man who marries it."

Theo intervened tearfully. "Oh, don't let us talk

about all that. Papa darling, I want to know why it's so wrong for me to have done what my own mother did."

"What's wrong is that your mother got me, while you've got a man who'll never be better than a mill-stone round your neck."

Once more George was about to spring forward with some half-strangled exclamation, but Theo waved him back. "Oh, but that can't be, father—"

"You'll see."

"But I've seen already. He's—he's—ideal. When you brought him down here after he came home wounded—"

"Oh yes; he was good enough to be wounded. He took it well. I understand he made a good soldier. But the war is over—"

"And our debt to the men who fought it is over too, I suppose."

"You didn't marry him to pay that debt."

"I married him because I love him, and he loves me."

Aunt Katty's observation was little more than a muttering to herself: "You'll get over that. I don't love anybody, and nobody loves me; and yet I do very well."

"If you want to know, dear, I thought so much of your man, because of his bravery and all that, that I tried to promote him in the bank. I did promote him. He was getting thirty-five a week before the war, and after he came back I gave him forty-five."

"Yes, father, I know, but—"

"I went further than that. I talked to Hickson about him, with a view to seeing what I could do to lift him along. Hickson keeps his eye on all the young



fellows in the bank and tells me what they're worth. Of this man he said—"

"Well?"

Blent spoke slowly, making his words significant. "He said that forty-five dollars a week was his value; that his value would never be more than forty-five dollars a week, not if he stayed with us for forty-five years."

"Oh, but he doesn't have to stay with you."

"True! He's always free to go somewhere else and see if he can get more."

"I thought that in business there was always a chance for an honest, hard-working man to rise."

"So there is—as high as his wings will carry him. But some men's wings don't carry them very high. There are two kinds of birds—there are eagles who soar, and penguins who hop along the ground. You've married—a penguin."

Crimson right up to the roots of his hair, Pevensey stood with clenched fists, as if he would have made the fight a physical one. Able only to stand and hear himself talked about, the physical offered the sole outlet to his resentment. But Blent continued in his tone of affection, full of the yearning of tenderness.

"But you don't have to stay married to him. If you find you've made a mistake, that you've got a penguin when you thought you had an eagle, you could come home again, and no one would hint at a reproach."

Theo shook her head fiercely, while he continued, "You can't have any idea, darling, of how much we love you, of how much I love you—"

"If you loved me, father, I shouldn't think you'd want to see me suffering."

"We often have to let people suffer just *because* we love them. If you're ever to see your mistake, it's through suffering you'll have to learn it. But don't you suppose that I suffer, too?"

She dropped on one knee beside him, her arms around his neck. "Oh, but what's the use of your suffering—what's the use of my suffering—and mother—and George—and all of us—when it would be so easy—?"

He held her away from him. "Oh no, it wouldn't be so easy. I know what you're going to say. You think it would be a simple matter for me to accept the whole thing and fork out money to support you both."

As George made an uneasy motion, Theo supplied the words, "We can do without that."

"Can you? Then that's all right. Even so I couldn't give in—"

With her arms once more about his neck she implored him. "Why not, father darling? Why can't you?"

"Because of what you've meant to me. You don't know how proud I've been of you, of how proud I hope to be again."

"You mean," she said, slowly, "if I leave him—and come back?"

"Yes, dear."

"But if I did, I shouldn't be the same. There'd always be a scandal hanging over me."

"No, not in these days. We've learned to give people a lot of rope. If you left him, and came back, and got your freedom, there'd be a little talk, but in the end it would die down. Then with your beauty

and your money, you'd soon marry some one of the kind we've always hoped—"

She got up wearily. "Oh no, papa dear! Don't think of it. It makes me sick. I could never bring myself to do it. I adore you. I always have. But there's my husband—my man! I'll stick to him as long as he'll stick to me."

He picked up his hat. "Very well, dear. It's for you to say. You can choose—and you choose him. All right. You're quite free. The rest of us can feel it, but we can't object." He tried to rise, but fell back again into his chair, making a motion toward Spen. "Spen, my boy, just run up to my room and get me that bottle of restorative, will you?"

Mrs. Blent was all abustle. "Sheila, run and get a spoon."

While Spen and Sheila sped away on these errands, Blent kept putting out his hands to brush both his wife and Theo away from him. "I want air. I'm all right. Don't make a fuss. I'm used to this, and it will pass off."

"Oh, father," Theo began, in deep emotion, "if I've brought it on—"

"No, no; you haven't done it. It's—this damned life."

Miss Katty broke in with her usual detachment.

"Life lived in the wrong way. Look at me! Don't care a tinker's dam what anybody does, and I'll outlive the lot of you."

Panting, as he lay back in his chair, Blent continued to explain to Theo: "You see, dear—I couldn't give in—because a forty-five-dollar-a-week man—would be of no more use to me than he'll ever be to you." Spen having come with the bottle and Sheila with the spoon,

Mrs. Blent administered the dose. As soon as he had taken it Blent resumed his theme. "A forty-five-dollar-a-week man isn't exactly a man. He's just a bit of stuff—which we feed to the machine."

At this description of himself Pevensey got so far as actually to bring out words: "Oh, but, sir—"

Having recovered his breath, Blent raised himself in his chair. "Every kind of business needs its raw material—wool or wood or iron ore as the case may be—and besides that it has to have men. The men are just an addition to the raw material. In the war they had to have cannon, and then they had to have cannon fodder. Well, as we have business, we have to have business fodder, to use up much in the same way."

Theo's deep voice was tragic in its protest. "Isn't it cruel to say that?"

"It's cruel, but it's fact. I'm only saying it to show you what you're tying yourself up to."

"But when I know him already as the best and noblest—"

"You know the individual; you don't know the type. The type is the commonest in the whole country, and the most helpless. You'll see it being brought in by trainloads every morning to every city in the world. You'll see it carted out again in the afternoon, to be brought in the next day. You'll see it behind a counter, or at a desk, every day in the year, every year in a lifetime, till it's used up. It doesn't run the machine, it feeds it; and those who do run the machine—"

"Couldn't do without it."

"Of course we couldn't do without it, not any more than we can do without any other kind of raw ma-

terial; but raw material is all it is. It gets its twenty-five or forty or fifty a week, but we who feed it to the machine never look on it as—well, as exactly human.”

“Would you say that to the public?”

“No. I’m only saying it to you. We couldn’t say it to the public, because the public wouldn’t understand. We couldn’t say it even to one another, we big employers, because some of us would be shocked. We all think it, we all know it; but we like to keep up our bluff.” Rising heavily, he put his Panama on his head and leaned on his stick. “But I can place your man for you, Theo. Except for his physical body, which is good enough, he’s not quite a man in the sense that you and I have given to the word. He’s a bit of raw stuff, caught in the machine, and he’ll never, never get out of it. He’s worth forty-five a week at most—”

“So *you* say!”

“Well, you can prove it easily enough. Let him give up his job and look for another. Let him show you how much more he’ll get. Look at him now! Even as I speak he sees himself tramping the streets of New York till the soles of his boots are worn thin, begging from office to office for the job that’ll give him more than we’re paying him—”

“Father, don’t go on! I can’t bear it!”

“You’ve got to bear it. You don’t know anything about it, and you must learn. I’m not giving you any of the old gags about Capital and Labor. This has nothing to do with either. Labor runs the machine as much as Capital. They work together. They fight, but they respect each other. This fellow belongs to the No-man’s-land which comes in between Capital and Labor, and is battered by the guns of both. He’s



too genteel to fight and too self-respecting to run away—”

Aunt Katty croaked out viciously, “And so you make him the goat.”

“Of course we make him the goat. Anyone’s the goat in this world when he won’t defend himself. Why not? That’s all he’s good for. The machine will eat him up alive, as it eats up millions and millions of him all over the United States—”

Theo challenged him. “If there are so many why don’t they turn on people like you—you’re only a handful—and kill you?”

“That’s a very good question. Why don’t they? I’ll tell you why they don’t. Because we keep them in order by the three things they admire the most—law, respectability, and religion. All three are organized on our side. So long as we possess them we have the whole squad of genteel commuters, enormous as it is, where they’ll never so much as squirm. Law, respectability, and religion oil our big machine. Your man is fed into it.” His voice took on a note of beseeching. “I don’t want to see you fed into it, too. He’s caught. So much the worse for him. But you can still escape and remain free.”

Looking from her father to George and from George back to her father, she spoke in her deepest and richest tones. “If he’s caught, I shall be caught with him.”

“Very well! You know the conditions. You take him—or us; not both.”

“Yes, I know the conditions. But if I take him, it isn’t because I don’t love you, or any of the family, just as much as I ever did. It’s because”—she flung out her arms in a desperate gesture—“because I’m

*married* to him, father. If you could understand what that means—to a girl—”

“I understand enough, dear. You turn your back on us—”

“No, I don’t,” she broke in, with vigor. “I don’t turn my back on any of you; only what he is I must be. If he’s business fodder, as you call it, I must be business fodder, too; and there’s no help for it.”

“You can try, dear; and if you don’t make a go of it—”

“I *must* make a go of it.”

“Still,” he persisted, “if you get tired of it, or anything goes wrong, or you can’t cut yourself down to the forty-five-a-week standard—”

“Father—please!”

“—the door will always be open for your coming back. You won’t burn your bridges behind you—”

Going over to Pevensey, Theo slipped her hand through his arm. “George—come!”

They had taken a few steps when Theo, looking over at her father, saw him standing with bent head. She rushed back to him. Throwing her arms around his neck, she kissed him. She kissed her mother with a long embrace. Mrs. Blent could only respond with her natural degree of passion, which was that of a ruffled hen.

“I’m your mother, dear. I’ll pray for you.”

Sheila alone flamed out in loyalty. “I’m not going to say good-by, Theo. Nobody in the world will keep me from seeing you as often as I can.”

Having kissed Sheila, too, Theo again took George by the arm, but when they had mounted the three steps it was he who turned unexpectedly. His words were a shock to Theo, and a surprise. They came

fluently, as if from some source of mastery which had never hitherto, unless it was in battle, been brought into play.

"You wouldn't listen to me this morning, sir—any of you. But the day will come when I'll make you."

As they passed out between the portières they heard Spen's laugh, with Sheila's rebuke: "Spen, please! There's such a thing as decency."

When the outer door had closed behind them Blent dropped tremblingly back into his chair again. "Give me another teaspoonful of that, will you, Augusta?"

While Mrs. Blent hastened to obey, and Sheila picked up a fan and fanned him, Aunt Katty grumbled to herself like a parrot in a cage:

"They'll get over it. Everyone gets over everything."

## *Chapter VIII*

TRUDGING back to Old Tilbury station in the heat of the day, both Pevensey and Theo were too stunned to speak. Sheila had run after them, begging them to wait till she could have one of the cars brought round, but their hearts were too hot to accept courtesies. They preferred to walk. They walked as Adam and Eve must have walked away from Eden, blindly, stumblingly, into a world of which she knew nothing and of which he dreaded the effect on her inexperience.

The days at Atlantic City had shown him more clearly than before that she didn't know how to be poor. Economy was not merely an art which one learned how to practice; it sprang from a point of view fundamental to one's life. Theo hadn't this point of view. To distinguish between what cost fifty cents and what cost sixty, and choose what cost fifty because the ten cents made a difference, was alien to her habits of mind. It was the same in a case of fifty dollars and sixty, or of five and six hundred. It was not exactly that she didn't know the value of money; it was rather that her training in life had been to have the best, while the best was identified with the most expensive. At the Paymore, where she ordered the meals, she ordered without regard to the sum total, as she had always done at Sherry's or Delmonico's. Not to have had *selle d'agneau Pauillac* when they could have satisfied their hunger with a couple of chops would have seemed to her absurd.

Not to have run into an embroiderer's shop on the Board Walk and buy a half dozen handkerchiefs of which she had no need, because they tempted her through the window, would have implied another kind of education. She had brought with her eighty-four dollars, the change left over from her monthly allowance, and the most natural thing was to spend it. As to what George had to come and go on she hadn't yet learned to think. She had not the kind of thought to give to it. Men always had money, not perhaps to buy a yacht, or to take a party round the world, but for the common needs and pleasures as they happened to come up. It was nothing that she had reasoned out; it was only what she had been allowed to see in life and so to take for granted.

Not in reproach he made these reflections, but in pity and fear. Again and again at the Paymore it was borne in on him that she was not fitted to be a poor man's wife. As the wife of a poor man of her own class, a man with no more than ten or twelve thousand a year, she could doubtless have managed; but to drop out of her own class, to maintain a household on what he could provide her with, must be as far beyond her range as to become a great operatic singer. She had not the elementary notes. With everything to learn, it might be too late for her to learn it. It was what he had dreaded ever since they had first talked of marriage.

And, as a matter of fact, something of the same kind was passing through Theo's own mind. In the collapse of her certainties she could only revert to a bit of self-revelation which had come to her at the Paymore, and had surprised her. It had surprised her the more because she could have made the initial



observation almost at any time since she had known him. Not at first, perhaps, because then he had worn khaki; but later, when he had begun to appear in civilian's clothes, she might have noticed it at any of their meetings. But she never did till they were at the Paymore. There he looked different from most of the men in the lobbies and the dining room. His suit didn't fit him so well; its material was coarse and cheap. It might have been bought ready-to-wear—and then it struck her that that was what it had been. Even the shirt, collar, and tie were made of stuffs inferior to those worn by her father and Spen, suggesting imitation.

But this was not all. In the small things of living she came to perceive in him a consciousness of restriction. Though he had made the big gesture of going to the Paymore, he seemed anxious otherwise to spend no more money than he could help. At first she had thought it a whim of a chance moment, and had laughed him out of it. If when she chose *selle d'agneau Pauillac* he preferred for himself the simplicity of a chop, she insisted that he have the more expensive. Though he yielded, she began to suspect that he yielded with regret. Of the rolling chairs on the Board Walk she had always been accustomed to make free use, while he took them only when she insisted. Only when she insisted did he throw away his money at "shows" and other amusements up and down the promenade, till she was obliged to notice it.

By the end of the second day it occurred to her that he was compelled to be careful because he was poor. It also occurred to her that poverty was odious. At every turn it clipped your impulses. It made you like a bird that was meant to fly, but which has never

had wings. All her own action was free; all George's action was bound. If there was anything she liked, her instinct was to get it; if there was anything he liked, his instinct was to feel that he couldn't have it. It was a matter of attitude of mind, and the attitude of mind was based on your bank account. She did not dwell on these thoughts; they came in flashes, as little things happened; but the impression they left on her was vivid enough, that George was poor, that to be poor was hateful, and that it was to be her mission to deliver him.

But the bit of self-revelation that had come to her was not precisely in that. It lay in the fact that she herself loathed poverty so intensely. Never before had she had occasion to suspect this trait in her character. There was indeed no reason why she should. The prospect of her ever being poor was so remote that it hadn't so much as stirred her to wondering what it would be like. To be facing it now was like finding herself flung overboard from a ship that should have been safe for the voyage of her lifetime.

It called for courage. It called for courage for George's sake more than for her own. In that she was never lacking, nor was she often at a loss as to seeing what to do. If she didn't see at once, she saw very quickly, and once she did that her spirits rose. They rose even now, with the very thought of her resources. There was a way, and she would find it. She would direct George into it; she would inspire him to follow it; she would carry the situation with her usual high hand. The assurance nearly gave her back her cheerfulness.

The road to the station was tarred and oiled to the polish of a ballroom floor. Motors, mostly those

of trippers from New York out for the holiday, sped over it in a long double procession. But the footpath on the side ran through a tangle of raspberries and blackberries, of jewel weed, goldenrod, meadow rue, and Queen Anne's lace, keeping up a dusty luxuriance in spite of days without rain. Once more the blackberries were ripe, though too bespattered for eating. Turning as she walked ahead of him, she called his attention to the fact.

"George darling, do you remember the day we picked them in Chocolate Lane and you told me about the time when you were a little boy?"

Leaning on his stick, he nodded with shining eyes, but found no words.

"Well, just think of all we've done since then. We've been true to each other; we've managed to meet pretty often; I've been able to get rid of two or three men whom papa wanted me to marry; and now we've been married ourselves. When you come to think of it, it's astonishing. It means that no matter what happened this morning we're not to be discouraged or cast down. You're not, are you, darling?—not too much, at any rate."

"Not at all," he smiled, with what bravery he could muster, "except for the effect on you."

"Oh, you needn't think of that! I begin to see through the whole thing already, and what we must do. I'll tell you on the train."

On the train her face was bright with her idea, though she had not as yet found the way to put it into words. She knew what she meant, but the thing was so wayward that to coax it into expression was like enticing a seagull to hop into a cage. Watching the Long Island towns slide by—old and squalid,

some of them were, while others stood for the latest thing in brand-new picturesqueness—she sought the aspect of her idea which she could put most simply into words and he would appreciate most easily. Knowing that he was sore and bitter, she slipped her hand into his, hoping by some psychic process to imbue him with her own confidence.

"You see, George dear," she tried to explain at last, "what my father admires is the man who can do something big and splashing and audacious. It must be successful, too, of course. If you could pull off anything like that—"

"He'd think I was fit to run the machine instead of being fed into it."

"Exactly."

He mused a little before answering. "The first thing we have to consider before pulling off anything big is the opportunity."

"Well, you always get that, don't you? I thought the whole history of business was full of opportunities."

"So it is; and yet—"

"And yet what, dear?"

"They don't seem to come to fellows like me. I'm not the type."

"Oh, nonsense! You're so brilliant and able. You put a hoodoo on yourself just by saying you're not."

"I never did see a chance of the sort."

"Was that because it wasn't there or because you weren't looking?"

"It might have been because I wasn't looking, for—for I've known other fellows who saw them."

"And got on."

"Yes, they got on; but they sometimes got on by means—"

"Which you wouldn't stoop to. Yes, I know there's a lot of that. I heard papa and Mr. Stone—he's a dear!—talking about it only the other day. Mr. Stone said that every man in business thought himself straight, and every other fellow crooked. Papa wondered if there was any business at all that wasn't crooked if you brought a conscience to bear on it. I don't know, of course. But it does seem to me as if there must be some big chances that a man with all your ability could use honestly."

"Oh, I suppose so."

"Well, then, darling, we'll keep our eyes open and look for them. That's what'll win papa. When we've really done something daring and unexpected . . ."

Because it helped her over the difficult minutes through which they were passing he allowed her to run on without question or argument. Had he told her what he had heard of her father's big operations in the common gossip of the bank he could only have hurt her and done himself no good. As a matter of fact, the big deal was carried out in a world to which he seemed to have no access. His work was perfectly definite; when his books balanced it was a completed thing, leading to no more expansion than a mortuary monument. It left no suggestions behind it; it afforded no openings. Theo talked of looking for big opportunities as the 'forty-niners in California looked for gold, and the Boers for diamonds in Kimberley; but the 'forty-niners had their rivers and the Boers their Rand, whereas a bookkeeper had no outlook and no field. Even Jackson Blent got out of his bookkeeper's pen by the fluke of his marriage, enforcing



his strangle hold on Josiah Spencer by his knowledge that the banker had a mistress and two illegitimate children. So long as the pious old man was afraid of this information reaching his daughter and his two sisters, to say nothing of the public, Jackson Blent could press his system of blackmail to his own advantage; and he pressed it. People had wondered why so masterful a business man as Josiah Spencer had caved in so easily; but any of the older employees at the bank could have told them; and what the older ones knew the younger were not long in learning. But he couldn't tell Theo that this, and not an initial genius for the striking financial *coup*, had been the secret of her father's rise, just as something equally shady was supposed to be the secret behind the rise of most men.

Moreover, he didn't want to talk of it. He wanted to keep these minutes on the train to think of what had happened within the last half hour. He had been scorched—to the bones, to the heart, to the soul. He had been treated not as a human being, but as an inanimate object. Even Theo, unconsciously, of course, had acquiesced in this way of taking it for granted that he had no opinions and that he couldn't feel. He himself had been helpless, helpless because he was tongue-tied, and more helpless still for being in all the false positions. An intruder in a house in which he wasn't wanted, only great courtesy could have given him a sense of toleration since it couldn't be one of welcome. But these Blents had no more instinct for courtesy than old Miss Katty Spencer. With the exception of Theo and Sheila, they were coarse-grained and arrogant. He had heard of purse-proud people; but never before had he seen them going

naked and unashamed. He himself was a thing to be ignored, to be condemned, to be called in so many words not quite a man, for the simple and only reason that he was poor.

And that was not the worst. After all, he was only an individual. Even Jackson Blent had hinted that as an individual he might pass as well as another. What cursed him was his class, because the class was cursed. It was out on the No-man's-land between Capital and Labor, raked by the guns of both, and enfeebled by its loyalty to law, respectability, and religion. Capital and Labor had apparently freed themselves from these allegiances, or had learned so to manipulate their forces that the allegiances were all the other way. The millions of innocent boobs, perhaps the majority of all the people in the country, who hadn't thrown over law, respectability, and religion, nor twisted them to serve their own ends, could be stoned, tormented, laughed at, and treated as business fodder. So long as they didn't defend themselves by force they would remain the world's great goat; and they would never learn so to defend themselves. They would, as Jackson Blent had put it, be driven into the cities every morning and carted out every afternoon probably to the end of time; and they would do it for the reason that law, respectability, and religion, and, Blent might have added, an instinct for the sanctity of duty, still meant something in their lives.

He was even more indignant on their account than on his own. He knew every tribe in this Israel, the men who stood behind counters, the men who sat cooped in pens, the salesmen, the saleswomen, the floor-walkers, the buyers, the stenographers, the teleg-

raphers, the librarians, the secretaries, that whole army of ministrants without whom business life could not go on for an hour, and who rarely failed to be at their posts when the clock struck. On salaries running from ten to fifteen dollars a week up to fifty and sixty, but not often to much more, they not only took care of themselves, but, practically one and all, did something to support the families in which they had been born. There was hardly one among them who hadn't a father or a mother, a sister or a younger brother, to whose needs some portion of every week's pay envelope had to go. They saw it go cheerfully, drawing in the belt of their own desires till times should be more prosperous.

When they fell in love they scraped and stinted and denied themselves in order to rake together the three or four hundred dollars on which they could afford to marry. When they married, a child, especially in New York or any of the great cities, was an expensive luxury. Sometimes they could afford one; the more reckless even two; but the majority perhaps couldn't afford any. It was not wholly the means that was lacking; there was so often no place to put them. The bandboxes in which they were quartered could barely house two without squeezing. For the baby's crib the choice was often between the pantry and the snip of a vestibule. If to gain space they considered going further into the country, there was the question of increased car fares to make a hole in the weekly wage. Grave protests were raised both in church and state against this particular form of economy; but none, so far as Pevensey knew, was ever uttered against the conditions that imposed it.

But all this—thrift, self-denial, privation, igno-

rance, crowding, childlessness, and, more than everything else, the pain of seeing others suffer, parents or children, without being able to do more than a very little to come to their relief—all this the members of the tribes took with an heroic lightness of heart which hardly ever moaned or rebelled or paused to remember that there were other kinds of lots in life. Shutting themselves within their narrow spheres, they had a good time with the small resources that remained to them. Not only were they uncomplaining; they were gay. Those who had little homes kept their doors open for those who had none. You went to call, and were asked to stay to supper. If you stayed to supper you went to the movies after the dishes had been washed. If you didn't go to the movies there was some cheap place where you could dance. In hot weather there were always the open street cars, with now and then a run to some near-by beach. To these enjoyments children were of course a hindrance. Those who had them stayed at home; while those who had none hesitated long before sacrificing all their freedom to the common parental instinct.

As the train entered the long tunnel, Pevensey felt himself moved by a mighty admiration for what he called "his own class." "Fealty to his order" the stately language of three or four hundred years earlier would have called it; but it would have meant the same thing. The more he went over the words in which that class had just been brutalized and scourged by one who himself had sprung from it, the fiercer grew his resentment and the more intense his loyalty. Theo would take him out of it, but he swore silently that out of it, in spirit at least, he would never come. Whatever were to happen to him as the



son-in-law of Jackson Blent—and there were still many possibilities—he would be true to the tribe that perhaps worked harder than any other in the country, that certainly endured more, and got least pay and credit.

Meanwhile Theo's optimistic energy had begun to reassert itself, and her heart fully to rebound. Now that an hour had passed since leaving Blentwood, the meaning of the whole thing came to her. Of course it was that! It couldn't be anything else than that. She would tell George while they were at lunch.

They went to lunch at once on arriving at the hotel. It was late; they were hot and tired. If they were not hungry, it was because of so many emotions. The emotions being so imperative, so all-consuming, Theo forgot to notice the spots on the tablecloth, which had already done duty for some one else, the cracked crockeryware, and the tarnished forks and spoons. At their late supper on the evening before, and at breakfast again that morning, these indications of a world other than the one to which she belonged had disgusted her. She spoke sharply to the waitress, who in turn was disgusted that anyone coming for eats to a place like the Plymouth should put on airs. "We ain't runnin' the Ritz-Carlton," she retorted. "Them that has to have a fresh tablecloth with every chew of victuals can inquire the way elsewhere."

Theo was indignant. "George, why did you bring me to a place like this? I never saw anything like it. And that room!"

With some humiliation George had confessed that he hadn't seen the hotel himself, that he had made his reservation by telephone, that he had acted on the ad-



vice of a friend who recommended the place as inexpensive but sufficient, and that if Theo could only spend the night there they would look for something better on the morrow. But on the morrow the first thing to be done was to go down to Blentwood. Of this visit Theo was sure of the result. George would simply have to come back and get their suitcases. So at breakfast she had gulped down her nausea and eaten an egg, as probably the article of diet least exposed to malign bacteria.

But at luncheon she had either grown accustomed to the place or was too much excited to notice its defects again. She had ordered a glass of milk and a roll; George, a bit of cold meat and a salad. While he ate doggedly, with eyes downcast, she gave him her new point of view.

"George darling, I see what it means. It never occurred to me till we were in the tunnel. Then it came with a flash."

Lifting his eyes, he saw her face alight with a new vision of the future. It was a face to express enthusiasms. When there were no enthusiasms to express it grew mysterious and somber, like a house with shuttered windows. Not that her enthusiasms were facile, shallow, or volatile. On the contrary, they were, as a rule, too deep and too strong. When she was mistaken, as she often was, she was badly mistaken; but this it was difficult to make her see. Even when her swans had been proven to be geese she persisted in seeing them as swans. You might call her to account for being over-positive, over-sanguine, headstrong, imperious, too sure of herself; but you could never deny that she was true. Her truth was her beauty.

Strictly speaking, it was all the beauty she had, unless it was the richness of the coloring under her dark skin, like red wine in a smoky glass. The same color bloomed into a natural, healthy carmine on her mobile lips, but otherwise a critical taste would have seen in her nothing remarkable. When you had conceded to her the loveliness of the line of her crispy dark hair, with many little tendrils to soften it, across the low, broad brows, and a pair of splendid eyes, you would have gone as far as a critical taste would have allowed. The eyebrows were finely arched, though a little too thick and bushy; but the dark eyes smoldered or glowed or broke into dancing flames, according to her moods, and were mirrors to her tempestuous soul.

If she was generally spoken of as beautiful, it was because of the straightness, the stanchness, which directed every look. Straightness and stanchness directed even her defiance, for she was defiant only when some principle she clung to as right had been rudely touched. Her true life was not in defiance, but in some form of enthusiastic activity. Thwart that, and you had either a little tigress to deal with or a gentle creature so hurt at your unkindness, and so dismayed by it, that you hastened to her relief.

It was part of her weakness that she had not been thwarted often, and perhaps not often enough. If not precisely spoiled by fate, she had been allowed too free a hand. Her mother couldn't cope with her; her father had enjoyed her willfulness. It was like his own. Secretly proud of this reproduction of himself, he had put no correction in her way. So long as she obeyed him . . . and that she did obey him he was sure.

Thus for Theo it was as unnatural to reach a place where life had slipped off its pleasant and prosperous plane as it would be to the world to wake to a morning when the sun wouldn't rise. Things *couldn't* have gone so wrong! With her they never did! The sun would rise. It was the law of nature. It couldn't help doing so. She must get at the explanation of why it had seemed not to rise when she knew it must have done so. And then it was that in a flash she received the illumination which she now imparted to George.

"You see, we've hurt him terribly. We've put him in a position in which he can't help himself, and there's nothing he hates so much as that. Not to be master makes him as frantic as it would a lion if he couldn't roar. He'd lash about madly because of the suppression, and be ten times more vicious than the Lord made him."

Pevensey nodded to the effect that he saw what she was driving at.

"There's a good deal of the child in papa; and you know how when a child is angered its first impulse is to kick and strike. What he wanted to do this morning was to wound us as we had wounded him. Any weapon to his hand was good enough to serve his purpose. That's why he said the things he did—about you and—"

"And about my class," Pevensey added, resentfully.

"Oh, well, that!" She allowed the point to pass. "He wanted to hit us just as hard as he could, and that was the only way he could do it. I've seen him like that before, not with Sheila or me so much, but with mother and Spen. There have been times when he's had no mercy on them; but the less the mercy, the

more abject his repentance, poor papa! when he'd got over his burst of temper. I'm like that myself. You know I have a temper, George darling; but when I give way to it don't get excited, because my come-backs are as craven as a dog's when it has been whipped."

Because he loved the unbeaten front she was able to put up, his smile was that of the sweet, dumb adoration which found its way to her heart as nothing else had ever done. She sometimes asked herself why she loved this man, not of her own order, in some ways inferior to herself, and with a background of poverty which she not only hated but of which she was afraid. And always she came back to this sweet, steady gentleness, like that of a great St. Bernard, trusting, strong, and true. If a St. Bernard were made man you would get a MAN. Though there was so much in which she was in advance of him, so much which she had to win for him, yet when it came to the actual physical presence she could always feel it possible to creep within his arms as into a shelter and a citadel. He had been so brave in the war! He was so able in intelligence! It was not in nature that one possessed of such a massive compound of endowments should fail to impress the world, and his father-in-law in particular, with his rock-like strength.

Her face was all aglow as she went on. "I'm really sorry for papa, when I think of his remorse. His fits of it are most awful. He doesn't say anything. You couldn't drag a word of confession out of him, because he never wants to admit that he has been wrong. But he'll *do*. . . . Did you ever see mother's diamond necklace? No, I don't suppose you ever did. Well, he gave her that after one of his storms of ill



temper; and once when he'd hardly left poor Spen a leg to stand on he treated him to a trip around the world. But when it comes to *me*"—her eyes shone mistily—"well, you don't know what we've been to each other. I dare say he's aching already to think how cruel he's been. It was the first time, too. He was never cruel to me before. Of course I feel it; but I know I can't begin to feel it as he'll soon be feeling it himself."

As she paused to look for her handkerchief in a little bag, and wipe her eyes, he found tongue to say: "That's his reputation at the bank. Everyone says that if he's ever been unjust to a fellow he finds a way to make it up to him."

"And that's what you'll find, yourself, George dearest. I'm sure of it. I dare say you'll see a sign of it to-morrow. If not to-morrow, then some day very soon. I know him so well. He won't be able to stand his agony of mind over what he's done to us. He really is a darling, if you make allowances. All we've got to do is to keep a stiff upper lip and be patient. When anyone has such a big loving heart as he has—well, sooner or later they have to give in for the sake of their own affections. If he could do without me it would be another thing. But . . ."

Leaving the table, they went up to their own room. But on opening and closing the door some of Theo's optimism oozed away from her. The room was at once a dream and a reality. Had she seen it but once, it would have remained a dream; but here she was coming back to it, as she had gone back to it after supper on the previous night, and after breakfast that morning. The reality lay in the returns. She would grow used to it. It would become a kind of home. It



would creep round her and engulf her life with its ugliness and squalor.

And yet it was the ordinary bedroom of the cheap and antiquated family hotel. It was only new to her experience. Accustomed in the way of bedrooms only to the spotlessly white, the flowery, the dainty, she was appalled by the brown-papered walls, the brown-painted woodwork, of a color purposely chosen "not to show dirt." The twin iron beds sagged in the middle as if a great many people had slept in them, over a long space of years. A threadbare, faded Brussels carpet, in which great sprays of red roses nestled in beds of pink fern suggested in every frayed edge that the bacilli of many generations were busy with their task of self-propagation and had better not be disturbed. An armchair upholstered in imitation tapestry of the dingiest hues was worn to the warp on the arms, while through a broken strap the stuffing protruded downward. Two cane-bottomed chairs and a huge old-fashioned black-walnut dressing-table with a mirror above it completed the furnishings. There was a bathroom, of course, and a closet for hanging clothes; but what made the glory of the room, and put up the price, was an alcove, screened by a portière of dreary nameless colors, which could be used as a dressing room. Two windows looking down into West Twenty-second Street were curtained with the same stuff as the portière, and the glass was further protected by pale yellow shades so dried with the sun that your finger went through them if you touched them carelessly. It was a fairly large room, with high ceilings and cornices, after the taste of the 'sixties, when West Twenty-second Street had been "residential." But West Twenty-second Street had gone

down, and the Plymouth, once a center of mid-Victorian pretentiousness, was frequented now by seedy old actors and actresses, or by the indescribable waifs and strays, with relics of respectability, which any great city draws into its shabbier byways.

But the detail in the room which to Theo was most eloquent had nothing to do with the hotel. It was George's battered old trunk, placed across the opening between the twin beds, and containing all his possessions. It was the trunk he had brought from home when he went to Elmira, and which had come with him from Elmira to New York. He had never replaced it, partly because replacing it would have cost money, but more because smartness of luggage was a concept that had not entered his mind. Whatever held together and would lock seemed to him sufficient. He would have been surprised now had he learned that to Theo's fastidiousness it stood for all sorts of pathetic differences of standard between him and her. Though she saw herself, on the first occasion of giving him a present, supplying him with the latest and most convenient piece of baggage on the market, she nevertheless had a lurking fear that perhaps, after all, the standard of her own future might come to be that of George's past.

It was not the dinginess of the room that dismayed her so much as its emptiness. She didn't mean emptiness of furniture, for of that, such as it was, there was enough. But it was empty of the means of living, of passing the time. The hot afternoon of a public holiday offered no inducement to go out; and here there was no inducement to stay in. George lit a cigarette and, drawing a chair to the open window, puffed the smoke outward. Having taken off her hat,

she put it away on the shelf of the closet. She took off her coat and hung it up. Then having gone to the mirror and touched up her hair, she had used up her resources. The hours stretched vacantly before them, with nothing to do, nothing to expect. They would sit where they were till it was time to go down to their disgusting supper, and after supper they would come back again. Though she was not a reader, she would have read, had they possessed a book; but they had nothing. It seemed to her that she had never confronted such a vacuous minute in her life.

Going to George, she sank on her knees beside him, her arms about his shoulders, her face against his breast. "Oh, George darling, how long will it be before you do something big that'll show papa what you're made of? Don't you think it will be soon?"

In spite of a sickly feeling of impotence, he rallied himself to take her attitude of confidence. "It may be soon, dear. I can't exactly tell. You have to wait for your chance. You can't hurry it."

"Oh yes, you can," she insisted, rubbing her face against his coat, "a man with your great powers."

## *Chapter IX*

THE next day was harder for Theo because she did not dare to go beyond sound of the telephone. Some one was certain to ring up. Since Aunt Katty had the address, it would be easy for them all to find out where she was. Her mother or Sheila would call her to talk about her clothes, as they knew that she must have them. George might find an opportunity to tell her that he saw some signs of relenting in her father. Even her father might by this time be so contrite as to want to speak to her himself. Where there was so much affection in a family there might be any kind of reversal of sentence. For one thing above all others was a foregone conclusion, that there could be no permanent estrangement between her and them. They might all have their tempers; but in the end there could be only reconciliation and reunion.

For nothing in the world would she have missed the first hint of their reaching out to her. When George went down to the restaurant for breakfast she had hers in her room. Sheila and her mother were likely to call early. They would know her great need of clothes and would lose no time in discussing how she was to get them. But when George came up again the telephone hadn't tinkled, though she was no less cheery. She had not expected them as soon as that; she had only wanted to lose no chances. Half past eight was earlier at Blentwood than it was in New York; it would probably be ten before they would get

round to it. Meanwhile, in going to the bank George was not to worry because she was alone, since all sorts of things might happen to make her day exciting.

On his side, George did his best to conceal his nervousness. He was going to face an ordeal. News had a way of leaking out, and it was likely that every worker in the bank would have heard of his romance. He had married the daughter of the Big Chief of whom they all stood in awe. This quiet, kindly fellow of whom nobody expected anything unusual had done this astounding thing, and was now coming back to his desk and his ledgers as if nothing whatever had happened. All eyes would be upon him; all tongues would be wagging about him. He would be a hero again, but a hero with a serio-comic vein in his situation. There would be plenty of the comic. No one of his colleagues, man or girl, would spare him that, and the questions they asked would not be always the most delicate. "Say, George, how did you—?" These inquiries would cover all aspects of the case from how he had met her to how he had proposed. He would have to take them good-naturedly, and, since he certainly couldn't find answers, he would grin silently. He would grin silently, though his heart would be listening for the step and the word which would summon him to the Big Chief's room. That the day could go by without an interview there seemed to him impossible. He only hoped that if it came about he would be able to hold his own, saying a word in defense of the class which yesterday had been maligned.

But he did not hide from Theo the likelihood of his being "fired."

"Oh no, you won't be, dear. I know papa. He'd consider that sort of revenge petty and ignoble. He

*W. Fritchman*



may not give in for a week or even for a month, but he wouldn't do anything small. What's much more likely to happen is that you yourself should leave this bank and go to another. There you'd take a position more worthy of yourself and your abilities. That's what I really expect of you, George darling; and it's exactly the sort of thing to have influence with papa."

Nevertheless, when the minute for his departure came they clung to each other as if he was going on trial for his life. In a measure it was what they felt. The day could not be otherwise than full of a life-or-death drama. Even should the outcome prove all that they were hoping for, they would have to ring the changes on fear, suspense, and emotion, living more vitally than on any other day in their lives. While they were ready to face all this, they could not but be keyed up to their highest nervous tension.

But when he had gone she calmed herself to listen with some degree of composure for the telephone to ring. George had brought up a morning paper and a couple of magazines to help her while away the time. Dragging the armchair to an open window where there was a breath of air, she tried to read the paper, though without being able to fix her mind on the news. When a timid knock came to the door her heart leaped with anticipation; but it was only the little colored maid who asked if she might "do" the room.

While the room was being "done" Theo sat in the alcove, her ear strained to catch the first notes of the tinkle. She had fixed ten o'clock as the most reasonable hour, or any minute after that. But when ten o'clock passed and eleven o'clock passed she did not permit herself to be discouraged. She invented in-

cidents at home to account for the delay. Her mother was tired, after the emotions of the previous day, and was staying in bed. Or her mother and Sheila were in her, Theo's, own room, selecting such articles from her wardrobe as they thought she would need most, and would ring when the task was finished. George couldn't call till his lunch hour, which didn't begin till half past twelve, though her father, if his great heart so impelled him, could do so at any time. She must, as she had counseled George, keep a stiff upper lip and be patient.

On the principle of the watched pot never boiling, she made an effort to forget that she was listening. She began a story in one of the magazines. But again she couldn't fix her mind on it. Her own story absorbed all her interest. Flinging the magazine aside, she walked the floor. When twelve o'clock struck and one o'clock struck she felt herself growing indignant. They were neglecting her. She had need of linen, and the suit she was wearing was hot. She couldn't imagine what her mother and Sheila were thinking of. It was of course in her power to put in a call for them; but her pride stood in the way. The first move must come from their side.

As George didn't ring in his lunch hour, she could only infer that he had nothing new to say. For this, too, she found a reason. If her father called him to a private talk it would naturally be after the business of the day was over. He would tell her when he came home. She must curb herself to wait till then. But Sheila and her mother . . .

Her luncheon was a glass of milk and a roll eaten in her own room. The day wore on. Slowly, cruelly, it came to her that she had been abandoned. Two

o'clock! three o'clock! four o'clock! and from the telephone there came no sound. The hours of expectation were ending in an agony. When George came home he found her pacing the room, white, tragic, her lips nearly bloodless, her fingers clenched. But the minute she saw his tired face the transport passed. All her instincts focused themselves into one great loving desire to comfort him. The easiest way to do that was to fling herself into his arms.

"Oh, darling, I'm afraid you've had a depressing day."

Releasing himself, he threw his hat and stick on the bed, while he strove to infuse a cheerful note into the languidness of his utterance. "More or less; but it wasn't so bad." His smile came back as he went on. "They'd all heard the news, all the fellows, all the stenographers and women clerks."

"But I hope they didn't bother you."

"Not a bit! They were very nice, nicer than I'd expected. As a matter of fact, I think they were a little afraid of me, now that I'm so nearly related to the Big Chief."

"And didn't you see him—papa?"

"Yes, I saw him, and he saw me."

"And didn't he speak to you?"

"No; but that's not strange. He never speaks to one of us fellows, unless it's to give an order."

"So that you got no impression—"

"Oh yes, I got an impression."

She was almost breathless. "Oh, George darling, what of?"

He limped toward a window, thinking out the right words. "I got the impression of a man trying his

best to do what he said yesterday—act as if you had gone out of his life and I had never come into it.”

“But he didn’t fire you, as you thought he might.”

“No; and I don’t think he will. He wants me to understand—he wants everyone to understand—that I’m not worth that much notice. By letting me be just what I’ve been all along he makes it appear that what has happened between you and me isn’t anything to him.”

“But of course they must all know that it is something to him—that it’s everything.”

They were discussing the pathetic folly of the banker’s pose when suddenly, at a minute when she was no longer listening, the telephone rang. She seemed not to touch the floor in the speed with which she crossed it.

“Yes, yes, this is Mrs. Pevensey. . . . It’s the office,” she explained in an undertone to George. “There are two ladies down there. Oh! It’s Sheila and Aunt Katty. If Sheila could only have come alone!” She returned to the receiver. “Will you say that Mr. Pevensey will be down at once to bring them up?”

“Couldn’t we see them down there?” he begged. “There’s a sort of parlor somewhere.”

“No, they must come up here. They may have confidential things to say to us. I wish it was anyone but Aunt Katty, but she’s better than nobody at all.”

While George was downstairs she stood at the open door of the room, waiting for the first intimation that the party had arrived on that floor. This came when they helped Aunt Katty out of the lift. With little screams of terror, she croaked, stormily:

“I guess you bought this lift second hand at the sale

of Noah's Ark. I'd rather go up and down in a paper bag, 'pon my soul I would. Don't push me, Sheila, you fool, or you'll have me down on my face."

Theo stepped into the hall. Aunt Katty, with George at one arm and Sheila at the other, was tottering toward her, while behind them a bell-hop dragged a big valise and a suitcase. It was Sheila who spoke: "Oh, Theo, we've brought you some things."

Having kissed her sister, Theo was about to bestow the same welcome on Miss Katty, but the latter rejected the caress. "You'll muss me up. I know how much you love me, without your having to peck at me." On the threshold of the room she paused and looked within. "You don't mean to say that this is where he's stowed you. Never saw such a rat-hole in my life. But what did I tell you? I said he wasn't worth a cent, now didn't I?"

While the bell-hop put down the bags and pocketed his tip Theo took charge of Aunt Katty, steering her toward the armchair as the seat of honor. "Bound to see for myself what sort of place he'd taken you to. Expected something pretty mean, but not so mean as this." Spying the armchair into which Theo was about to lower her, she shrieked and struggled backward. "Not there! I wouldn't sit in that thing, not if the only other choice was to be strung up by the wrists."

Sheila, who had been looking about, tried to relieve Theo of some of her embarrassment. "Why, Aunt Katty, it's lovely! It's so quaint and old-fashioned. And with this"—she lifted the portière screening the alcove—"they've got quite a suite."

"I don't care if they've got a palace. I'm not going



to sit down in that dirty man-trap, and you can't make me."

Theo was vexed. "I'm so sorry you've come here, Aunt Katty."

"I am, too, now that I've seen it."

"I didn't want you to."

"That's why I did it. I was sure you had something to be ashamed of."

Sheila came forward with a small chair, carefully selected, doing her best to help. "Here's a chair that doesn't seem so bad."

"Don't let any of it touch me," the old woman cried, as they guided her stiff form to the seat, "not any more than you can help."

"You'll be quite all right, Aunt Katty," Sheila assured her. "You see," she added to Theo, "the only way I could bring your things was to have her take me in her car. Father told mother I wasn't to use one of our own cars. He doesn't know I've come. Neither does mother; or she's supposed not to know, though she does really. Poor mother's so mushy. If father told her she was to stop even thinking of you she'd try to do it."

Theo's courage began to ebb. "Then he still feels—"

"Oh, you can't tell what he feels. As far as you're concerned, he's as dumb as a grave. Oh, Theo, do take off that hot-looking suit, now that you've something to change to. Come along and I'll help you. Let's go in here—" she indicated the alcove. "George, give us a hand with this heavy valise."

On returning to the room from his task with the valises, Pevensey took on the detached, defensive air which always settled down on him in presence of any

of the Blents. Miss Katty eyed him through her lorgnette.

"What made you such a chump yesterday? Why didn't you hit back?"

"I didn't get a chance."

"You didn't make a chance. When you want to hit back, you do it."

"But I don't want to hit back till I'm sure I'll hit straight."

"What makes you afraid that you won't?"

"One reason is that what he said was true."

"That your value is only forty-five a week?"

"Not so much that as that"—how was it he put it?—"as that law, respectability, and religion have got it fixed so that forty-five a week *seems* to be my value."

"Then why don't you kick?"

"I'm not sure that I know how."

"If you don't kick, some one'll kick you."

"You don't have to tell me that."

"Well, then, you've got no spunk."

"Sometimes there's more spunk in taking kicks than in giving them."

"Not when you're dealing with a Jackson Blent. The more you'll stand the more he'll lambaste you."

"All the same, he has law, respectability, and religion all lined up behind him. We've got nothing but our fists."

"And if you'd only use them I'd hold the sponge."

He laughed and shook his head. "Even that wouldn't help me much. Law, respectability, and religion would never let me get at him. They'd knock me out before I'd entered the second round."

"If you had the spirit of a rabbit you wouldn't talk

like that." She struggled to rise. "Here, help me out of this. Hi, Theo!"

Theo spoke from within the portière. "Yes, Aunt Katty?"

"Whatever you take off, don't lay it down, or hang it up, or put it in a drawer, or anything. You don't know what you'll catch in a rubbish heap like this. I'm for getting out of it. Come along, Sheila! I've seen all I want."

Behind the portière Theo was fastening the simple summery dress which she could wear in the dining room without being conspicuous, when she felt Sheila thrust something into her hand. It was a little roll containing bills each of the value of twenty dollars.

"It's my month's allowance," Sheila gasped, apologetically. "I want you to have it. I've got thirty-five left over from my hundred of last month. Besides, if I need any more I can get it from mumsie, or buy what I want and charge it."

But Theo forced it back on her. "No, darling! I couldn't. Don't you see? It's papa's money, and so long as he doesn't want me to have it, I can't go behind his back and get it by some other way. When he gives me money again of his own free will—"

"Oh, but he won't do that—not for a long while—if he ever does—unless you leave George and come back."

"Sheila, do you mean that?"

"Well, it's the way it looks to me and all of us. He never was like this before. He thinks that by holding out he'll make you give up George."

"Then, when you get the chance, will you tell him that if he wants me back, that isn't the way to bring me?"

"I'd tell him if he'd ever let me speak of you. But he won't—not so far. Spen never speaks of you, either. It's only mother and me. . . ." Unaware of the cold water she was pouring on her sister's hopes, Sheila rattled on. "You're going to take an apartment, aren't you, Theo? You can't stay here, can you? It's awful, isn't it? . . ."

## Chapter X

THE suggestion of the apartment was the chief one the visit left behind it. George and Theo talked about it that evening, the prospect of a home of their own doing something to offset the depression wrought by Sheila's information as to their father's mood. At least it did that for Theo. Once the idea of a home of her own was vividly presented, she saw no reason why she shouldn't have one. It was, in fact, part of the process of getting married. What she had vaguely dreamt of was a little house which her father would build on the Blentwood estate, giving her *carte blanche* to furnish it according to her taste. As George would be earning then the income to which his abilities entitled him, there would be no difficulty as to the upkeep. Life having trained her to take such pleasing things for granted, she easily rose to them now, her spirits making use of any excuse for growing optimistic.

"It would have to be very modest, of course," she said, with an air of experience she did not possess, "but I think I know what we could get along with. I shouldn't care how cramped it was so long as it was clean and fresh."

She described the apartments of girls she knew who had married on small means, but who somehow managed to live in the right part of New York and keep up some kind of an appearance.

"Not that that matters to me, only I shouldn't want



to go up on the West Side or to any of the suburbs, because one's so far away from the people one knows. I'm sure there'd be something on the East Side that would suit our needs, and I shouldn't care how far uptown we went so long as it wasn't *too* far."

To all of this George replied vaguely or did not reply at all. A home of his own had no definite place in his outlook. He was rather afraid of the idea, afraid of the expense and the responsibility. It was so many years since he had had a home that he had forgotten its uses and advantages. "Rooming," and picking up his meals where he could find them, had come to be as much a matter of course to him as it is to a nesting bird. So long as you had a roost for the night you had the essential, and the roost could be varied according to the dictates of taste, companionship, or purse.

That Theo could not live like this he knew, of course; but she could "board." In as far as he had a practical vision of their life together, if thrown on their own resources, it was a life of boarding. He thought there were places in Brooklyn or Harlem or the Bronx where they could get room and board for fifteen a week apiece, which would allow them another fifteen for incidentals. He had made no plans along these lines, for the reason that Theo had been so sure of the reconciliation with her father. Now that that had fallen through . . .

As to an apartment, he would consult Maggs, a friend of his at the bank, and Burrage, another friend. They had had experience. Maggs kept up a little home on fifty dollars a week, and Burrage another on forty. They were two of the places at which in the old days, before he knew Theo, he had most often dropped in

for a Sunday evening's pot luck. Maggs lived in Brooklyn; Burrage in Jersey City. He knew they would both give him points.

But he knew, too, that there was a first point of all, which neither would think of giving him. Mrs. Maggs had been a milliner's assistant before Maggs married her; Mrs. Burrage had worked in a ladies' hair-dressing establishment. The one was the daughter of a cab-driver, the other of a clerk in a dry-goods store. Each belonged to a family in which nothing was ever done which wasn't done by themselves. They had learned the A B C of self-help in their very infancy. They knew how its words were spelled and parsed, and the language it gave them to speak. Their ideas were all expressed in that language, and they were exactly such ideas as he had himself—ideas of restriction of which you made the best. There was a best to be made of restriction, and both Elma Maggs and Lemuella Burrage had that knowledge of how to set about it which sprang from the fact that it was most of the knowledge they possessed. What Theo would lack would be the A B C, the grammar, the elementary rules. A few main principles would be suggested by her common sense; but she wouldn't know how to lay them down as bases of her actions. She would never get the scale. She would speak poor and think rich, and go on doing it till years of bitter experience had rooted out the old education and ground the new one into her.

During lunch hour on the following day he took care to get on the high stool at the counter of the Spa next to the one on which Billy Maggs was perched, like a spider on a blade of grass. Billy's lunch was a

glass of milk, a doughnut, and a slice of apple pie; George's a glass of milk and a sandwich.

"Say, Billy, how do you set to work to find a swell little flat like yours, and what do you pay a month for it?"

Billy informed him that he paid seventy a month for it, but that Elma had found the apartment. She was clever at that sort of thing, and if George would bring his young lady to see them some Sunday afternoon Elma would give them more information in an hour than a real-estate agency in a month. He added, shyly:

"I suppose if you're looking for a layout like ours it means that the Big Chief hasn't come across. None of my business of course!"

George replied as nonchalantly as he could. "Oh no! No question of it. He told Theo so before we were married."

Crowded off their stools by the sheer pressure of hungry men behind them, they walked back to the bank together. On their way they passed Ruddy Blake, who once sold bonds for the Hudson River Trust and was now the head of one of the best known brokerage houses in the country.

"How do they do it?" Billy asked. "You and I mind Ruddy Blake, a hungry-looking boy, toting his bonds from office to office like a peddler, till we were sorry for him. And look at him now! Why don't that happen to you and me? That's what I want to know."

It was also what George wanted to know, and since Billy had brought the subject up he confessed his desire.

"Got a book about it," Billy went on. "Fine book,

too, but I've read it all through, and damned if I'm much the wiser. Nothing in it that fits *me*."

On inquiry George found that the title of the book was *Men Who Are Making America*. The men who were making America had mostly begun with nothing, as he and Billy Maggs had begun, and now they were worth their millions. It might, however, contain the secret he was looking for, and which Theo supposed him to know. He asked Billy Maggs if he might have a look at the volume.

"Sure! Bring it to-morrow. Hope it'll do you more good than it's done me."

On arriving home, Theo opened the door to him, radiant as he hadn't seen her for a long time.

"George darling, I've found the sweetest little apartment, in quite a good neighborhood, and just the right size."

He asked the question which to him was the most vital. "What's the rent?"

"Come in and I'll tell you all about it. You sit there"—she pointed to the armchair close to the open window—"and I'll perch on the arm where I can be close to you."

Playing with his crisp fair hair with one hand, while the other lay in both of his, she recounted her day to him. After he had left for the office she had gone straight to Cheese & Wellman's, the real-estate people, and asked for a list of small vacant apartments which she could see at once.

She had visited eight or ten. "And, oh, darling, the horror of them! Dirty and dark and old-fashioned—you wouldn't kennel your dog in them."

"What were the rents?"

"Oh, from a hundred up to a hundred and fifty,

according to the size. But the rent didn't matter. You wouldn't have lived in one of them at no rent at all."

Then when she was tired, footsore, heartsore, and almost ready to cry, she had passed a nice, new-looking house, with a sign at the door bearing the notice: "Apartment to let. Apply Janitor."

"So that I found it myself. The agency was of no help to me. It isn't much in size, only two rooms and the darlinest little kitchenette, just big enough for a doll's house; but then the whole place is enamelled in white, with those long French doors like windows that I've always loved. There's no maid's room, I'm sorry to say; but the house keeps a supply of maids, and I talked to a little colored one. She'll come by the day and do all the work for two dollars and a half a day—the days she's well enough. Now, don't you think it sounds lovely?"

He admitted that it sounded lovely, and once more asked the rent.

"That's the wonderful part of it. I was sure, from those I'd seen, that it would be a hundred and fifty at least; and what do you think, darling? It's only a hundred and twenty-five."

He hated to dash her spirits, but there was no help for it. "But, darling, don't you understand? We can't pay that in rent."

She was both surprised and hurt. "We can't pay a hundred and twenty-five, and only two and a half for the maid?"

"Count up, dear. How much shall we have a month, on forty-five a week?"

Without leaving her perch, she drew away from



him. "We couldn't do it on forty-five a week, of course; but that isn't all the money you have, is it?"

"It isn't all, but it's nearly all."

"Do you mean to say that you've no money in the bank, or anywhere, like everybody else?"

"No, dear! Isn't that what I've been trying to tell you?"

"But what do you draw your checks on?"

"I don't draw any checks. I've never had a bank account, except in the savings bank."

She rose, puzzled. "But when we were at the Paymore you had plenty of money."

"I had plenty of money for that—yes. But listen, dear, and I'll explain to you. Before we were married I had eight hundred and seventy-three dollars in the savings bank. I started the account with four hundred dollars left me by an aunt of mine nine or ten years ago. The rest I've saved myself. The day we were married I drew out five hundred, for our expenses at Atlantic City and here. Before we leave here most of that five hundred will be eaten up. The remaining three hundred and seventy will go to furnish our apartment. But the rent of the apartment must come out of my salary and be in proportion to what I get."

Dropping on to the flat top of his battered old trunk, she sat pensive. He had given her much to think of. This question of doing wholly without invested income was like one of doing wholly without air. She had known, of course, that George was poor; but poor was, after all, a term to be used relatively. The Allenbys were called poor; but they must have twenty thousand a year, at least. But to have nothing at all . . .

"So you didn't have any money whatever except what you had in the savings bank?"

He was a little exasperated. "How could I have, dear? Where could I have got it?"

"I don't know." Her voice went blank. "I only supposed that people did have some."

"That's because you're a rich man's daughter and have only lived with rich people. But you've known that I was poor—"

"I know people who are poor, even at Old Tilbury; and yet they—"

"Keep up a position. But they're poor because they've only fifty thousand a year when their neighbors have half a million. My kind of poverty is different."

"You haven't anything?"

"No, I haven't anything."

"But doesn't that seem to you—awful?"

"You only ask that question, dear, because you're a rich man's daughter. You don't realize that in proportion to the number of people in the world very few have anything except what they earn, just as in my case. Of the hundred millions of people in the United States it's probable that ninety millions have nothing beyond their weekly wage like me, while only the other ten millions would be like you. You must remember that the great majority of human beings can only live from hand to mouth. I'm not an exception—"

Springing from the trunk, she threw herself upon him. "Oh, but you are an exception, George darling! There's nobody like you in the world, and that's why I love you." Their embrace over, she settled herself cozily again on the arm of the chair, her spirits rising

to the new necessities. "This is the way it'll be. We won't have that apartment. We'll get a cheaper one. And we'll have a maid to live with us. Perhaps that won't cost so much."

Though ashamed to the heart, he felt obliged to emphasize the facts. "But, darling, I'm afraid we couldn't keep a maid in any way."

"Couldn't keep a maid in any way? Then how should we get the work done? You've got to think of that."

"I am thinking of it. You couldn't do it."

"I shouldn't mind; but I don't know how. I've never learned. It never occurred to anyone that—"

"That you'd ever be in this situation. Of course it didn't. That's what makes the whole thing so unbearable."

She drew away from him sharply, her deep voice growing tragic. "Unbearable—to whom?"

"I suppose I mean to us both."

"It isn't unbearable to me."

"But it is to me. It makes me despise myself. I've let you get into this awful mess—"

"If it comes to that, I got myself into it. I got you into it, too. But you don't suppose I'm sorry, do you?—not unless you are. Are you, George darling? Tell me frankly."

He did his best to answer truthfully, speaking with the shining eyes she loved. "I'm—I'm sorry for the things that are going to be hard for you; but for me it's nothing but a"—he sought an expression—"but a superb adventure."

"And that's what it is for me," she declared, with enthusiasm. "George, I'd rather be with you, without a cent, than have all the money in the world."

Where it's only a question of ways and means, surely we can work it out together."

The tone was a new one. It was new since the morning; it was new since the beginning of the present talk. It suggested a moving away from the attitude of waiting on her father toward something like dependence on themselves. He was inclined to challenge her, and only didn't do so through fear of catching her in the trap of an emotion that might not last. If they ever came to an agreement of the kind that he was hoping for, he wanted the ground to be more solid beneath both her feet and his own.

He waited, therefore, till they had come up to their room after supper in the uncleanly dining room, to which, to her dismay, Theo found herself growing accustomed. She was growing accustomed to the room. That is, she ceased actively to think of it. When she thought of it the old disgust returned; but she could come back to it with her mind on other things, and little or none of her first repugnance. Without turning on the lights, she made him sit in the arm-chair near to the open window, while she brought a couple of pillows from her bed to make cushions on which to crouch beside him. To the sounds of the street, to the fetid air, she was becoming as hardened as to everything else.

They talked of the possibilities before them, and he explained to her what they could manage if they went to live in a boarding house.

"I shouldn't like that," she said, promptly. "I'd rather stay here."

To his chagrin, he was obliged to tell her that staying there was beyond their means. With three dollars a day for their room, and an average of eight

for their meals, the mere living expenses came to nearly eighty a week, while the income was forty-five.

She sighed. "It's awfully little, isn't it?"

"Yes, from your point of view. Unless you can change your point of view—"

"The only way I see of doing that is by going without things."

"No; it's got to be deeper than that—how do they say it?—more radical. It isn't a question of going without things; it's one of never thinking of having them. I wish I could get it into your head that that's the difference between people like you and people like us. You know you can have things, even if you give them up. We can't have them. We don't think of them. We let them lie outside our minds."

"Oh, there are lots of things I can't do. I wanted to go to Dalmatia with the Ellises last year; but all the family were opposed to the idea, so that I had to drop it."

"Yes, but if the conditions had been right you could have gone. I couldn't. None of us could. We should no more dream of it than we should of having a bird's wings or a dog's scent. It doesn't belong to us. I think within the limits of forty-five dollars a week; you think with the freedom to which money is not a consideration. Now unless you can bring your mind down to my—"

"I don't see the need of doing that when it may not be called for. If papa were to give in, which he may do any day—"

"But hasn't done yet—"

"Or if you were to do the big thing which would improve your position and make you independent—"

"Which I don't as yet see how to do."



"Still they may happen—"

"But, darling, don't you see? It isn't what may happen that we've got to think of, but of what's happening. What's happening may go on only for a time; but so long as it does go on—"

"We must be prepared for it. I see that well enough, of course."

"Well, then, don't you think that we might cut down all our ideas to what we can afford to pay for?"

"But we can't afford to pay for anything—on so little."

"Oh yes, we can. It's a question of the scale. I know men who keep up nice little homes on about the same salary as mine, and sometimes a little less."

He spoke of Billy and Elma Maggs, of Alfred and Lemuella Burrage, as friends to whom they could go for advice in the matter of rents and housekeeping. Billy paid seventy a month and the Burrages probably not so much; but both families lived decently. Elma and Lemuella did the work . . .

"And what they can do," she threw in, bravely, "I suppose I could do."

By way of encouragement he could only say, "They seem very happy in doing it."

She laughed and pressed his arm. "It isn't that that makes them happy, you old goosey. It's love. I could be happy, too—washing and scrubbing and cooking—if I knew how to do them—and I suppose I could learn—so long as I was doing them for you."

Hesitating again to take her at her word, he spoke only after some consideration. "That's a great deal to say, Theo dear. How much of it is true?"

"Why, it's all true! What do you suppose?"

"But do you see what it means?"

"I see that it means what I should be only too happy to do."

"That if we took a little flat of which we could afford the rent, you'd be willing to cook and wash and scrub, just as if I'd married a girl in my own class?"

"But, George darling, you've married a girl in your own class. You belong to my class."

"The question is, dear, do you belong to mine?"

Rising from her pillows, she stood in front of him. "I see what you're coming to. You're asking me if I'm willing to give up what you call my freedom of thinking, to think on the scale of forty-five dollars a week as you do yourself." She threw back her head in the way she always did when daring or defiant. "Well, I am."

"And how much do you realize of what that means?"

"I dare say I don't realize much of it; but whatever it means I'll bring myself down to it for your sake."

"And you think you can?"

"I don't know whether I can or not; but I can try."

"And you understand that you'd be coming out from among your own kind of people—"

Throwing herself on her knees, she twined her arms about his neck. "George dear, I don't understand very much about it, not any more than a soldier when he goes to war. The soldier just does what he has to do, whether he understands it or not. All I know is that whatever you want of me, that I'm willing, that I'm eager, to become. You might have married some one much better fitted to help you than I am; but since you've married me I want to be everything to you that I can. I'll make myself a servant or

a drudge or anything else you ask of me. I know I'm stupid and ignorant about your kind of life, but if I can learn I'll learn. Only don't doubt me, George. I'm yours absolutely and without reserves."

So in the darkness, lighted only by reflections from the street, they sat in a silent communion which each felt to be a sacramental replighting of their troth.

## *Chapter XI*

SPEN had shot his bolt. He had proposed to Helen Allenby and been refused. It had happened so simply as to be all over before he was fully aware that it had begun.

He had not meant to make his proposal that afternoon. It had slipped out. After long arranging and rearranging what he should say when the time came to say it, he had said something futile and ridiculous.

They were walking home from tennis at the Brook-shires'. Having played late, they found the early September gloaming already closing in. The road, like most of those in Old Tilbury, might have been one in a private park, a mile of beech and oak, touched here and there with the yellow of autumn as with spots of lingering sunlight.

As a matter of fact, Spen was wrought up to that emotion which Theo's defection had imposed as a daily mental state on all the Blents. Pretending to put her out of their minds, they found her more in their minds than she ever was before. From this the father and son suffered most, since Sheila and her mother got the relief of their whispered conversations. But the heroic method of silence, like all over-strict repression, created inner ebullition.

When Jackson Blent had issued the decree that Theo's name was no longer to be heard in the household, Spen had thought the attitude a noble one. It was in the grand manner. It was true to the best

traditions. Clothing himself in a marble inscrutability, he went to the bank, he caught glimpses of George Pevensey, he frequented the golf links, he played tennis, he went out to dine, with no betrayal of a pang.

And yet his heart was ravaged. He couldn't keep his thoughts away from Theo and the plight into which she had fallen. Though he and she had squabbled all their lives, he had secretly been proud of her. He had loved her, too, with the sheepish, unavowed affection of a brother for a sister sure to make a splendid position for herself, and so to give the family that lift along which he felt the need so strongly. It hurt him to think of the way in which she was living, and of that he couldn't be ignorant so long as Aunt Katty was in the house. Whoever was silenced, she could not be, and she chose the moments when most people were about for saying what she knew.

"Wish you could smell the place. Worse than bilge water. I bet Theo'll be down with typhus before she's been there a month. Awful ashamed she was to let me see the sort of hole he'd stuffed her in, but that was what I made the trip for. Shouldn't wonder if she's starving herself, too. I wouldn't eat a walnut in a pigsty like that, not if I'd cracked it myself."

Grieved as he was, Spen remained, however, far from relenting. He couldn't relent, for Theo's own sake. His father was right. Hers was a spirit only to be tamed by the thumbscrew of compulsion. When she had borne all she could stand she would return to her right mind and come back to them. Since their cat-and-dog methods had become so much a part of



themselves, he probably wouldn't be gracious to her even then; but his heart would welcome her.

Meanwhile he had come out early from the bank and gone to play tennis at Brookshires' in order to test the reaction of the scandal on himself. Though not quite sure, he imagined that it had made a difference. Striving as he was for the "best" standing among the "best" people he was sensitive to little shades of cordiality. He fancied that Mrs. Brookshire welcomed him with some constraint. Other people lowered their voices when they spoke to him, as if in coming out to play he had left a member of his family lying dead. Helen Allenby avoided him. Not once did they play in the same set throughout the afternoon. Only by hanging round did he manage to walk home with her.

"I didn't think you meant to speak to me," he complained, as soon as they were beyond the Brookshire gates.

She took this lightly. "Speak to you? Why shouldn't I? I didn't notice that I hadn't."

A tall girl without beauty, she had the air of distinction which came from life-long association with what Spen classified as the best. In the ways of which he thought so much she had nothing to seek or to strive for. She was serene, assured. If there were details in her life as to which she was dissatisfied, she never had to brood, as he had brooded often, on the question of being considered "good enough" for this circle or for that. Spen had a horror of the blackball, knowing it to have been used against him once or twice, whereas she could not be blackballed anywhere.

Her dress was the simplest possible—a white skirt,

a loose white jacket, and over her shoulders a scarf of blended blues. A blue band ran around the hat shaped like a Panama, of which the brim was pulled down in front, as well as at one side. With her hands in the pockets of her jacket, and her racket tucked under her arm, she walked with a long, free stride due partly to her out-of-door life, and more to a spirit of independence.

Of the two, Spen's costume was the one that suggested previous thought, though all that could be seen of it was a long gray flannel overcoat reaching to the heels. A sporty European coat, he wore it open, the collar turned up, while he himself went bareheaded. His hands being thrust into the slits of the long side pockets, his racket protruded from one of them like a palm-leaf fan.

The offhand statement that she hadn't noticed whether she had spoken to him or not rendered him a little petulant. "Well, you can bet I noticed it."

"You must have been very observant."

"Not more so than usual." Petulance, together with his high nervous tension, urged him to going further than he had intended. "When a fellow feels about a girl as I feel about you—"

She turned on him the protest of her small, beaked, aristocratic profile. "Spen, please don't be silly."

"It isn't silly to want you to marry me."

"Oh, Spen! There you go, spoiling everything! We've got along so well from ever so far back; and now! Of course I couldn't marry you! I don't see why you should think so."

"A good many people have thought so," he returned, savagely.

She quickened her pace. "Oh, have they? Then

I must have seen more of you than I supposed. I was thinking so little about it—”

“Don’t you like me?” he asked, in an almost childish tone of pique.

“Like you? Of course I like you! I like you very much—for what you are.”

“And what’s that?”

“Oh, I’m not going to analyze and explain. You’re a nice boy; you’re a good boy; you’ll probably be a rich boy.” She surprised him by stopping in the road, with an opening of the heart she had never displayed to him before. “But, oh, Spen! if I ever married I should want a great deal more than that.”

“Well, how do you know I couldn’t give it to you?”

“Oh, I know!” She walked on again. “It’s easy enough to see what’s in you and what isn’t. But, Spen, don’t let’s talk about it. Let’s forget it and try to be friends just as we’ve been all along.”

After walking a little while in silence, he said, miserably, “Has Theo anything to do with your turning me down like this?”

“Theo? What could she have?”

“Oh, I didn’t know but what you might think us all tarred with the same brush. But it doesn’t follow that because she’s married a blackguard—”

“Has she? I’d understood that she’d married a perfectly honest young man in your father’s employ, who’d done big things in the war—”

“Any man’s a blackguard who creeps round a young girl and persuades her to run away with him because she’s going to have money.”

“Well, she’s got a change, at any rate.”

He looked at her suspiciously. “A change from what?”

"From the awful monotony of Old Tilbury."

"It's a very pleasant monotony, isn't it?"

"That's its curse. We're being stifled and strangled with pleasantness. Did you ever think how inane it is?"

"I can't say that it ever struck me that way."

"It isn't a life; it's a round on which we keep going even when we're bored to death with it. We give lunches and teas and dinners; we play polo and tennis and golf; we meet the same people every day and everywhere, and say the same things to them. Theo's got out of it, and I envy her."

On this note she said good-by to him, leaving him puzzled and dismayed. He said so that evening to his father, or said so as plainly as he could express anything so delicate.

"Is there any business abroad that I could lend a hand in? Like to get away for a few weeks from Old Tilbury."

They were alone in the big living room, Mrs. Blent and Sheila having gone upstairs. Each sat smoking, with an evening paper across his knees. Blent eyed his son sharply.

"Anything gone wrong?"

"Not exactly. Been a little—a little disappointed."

"What in?"

"Well, if you want to know, it's in Helen Allenby. She's—she's not just the girl I thought she was. Sort of lacks ideals."

There were many questions on his father's lips, but he decided not to ask them. He had enough on his mind as it was. Spen was a man, capable of managing his own business. After smoking a little in silence, he grunted out:

"Hope to be back at the bank the day after tomorrow. Doctor thinks it'll be safe for me then. See what I can do for you."

But he brooded over Spen's words, and was disappointed on his own side. While he had built no plans on the Allenby match, he would have liked it. He, too, had known the blackball, and had spent years of his life in nourishing a grudge against enemies in ambush. Unknown to him as they were, it would have pleased him to give them the surprise of his son's marriage to an Allenby. But he was not disposed to eat humble pie for the sake of it. If the Allenbys were turning up their noses because of what Theo had done, they could go to hell. Theo was his child and he knew how to deal with her. All through that wakeful night he kept having pointless tussles with his neighbor Allenby, who more than anyone else in the world was his model of a gentleman.

He was, in fact, to Jackson Blent what a big boy at school often is to a small one, a pattern to be admired, imitated, and revered. He had that unconscious habit of command which Blent was afraid he himself had not. He did have a habit of command, but it was conscious, cultivated, deliberately adopted. It imposed on his subordinates at the bank, on his servants, on his family; but it wouldn't impose on the members of any of those clubs into which he had not been elected. With a veritable yearning to be the type of gentleman who hardly knows he is a gentleman because to be one is so much a matter of course, he copied Paget Allenby in dress, in manner, and as far as he dared in his very intonations. This he kept secret, as too childish to acknowledge even to himself; and yet the craving to be taken for a "real



aristocrat" and not an imitation one lay behind most of his ambitions and even his parental love. At one time or another in the course of his life he had come in contact with men who, unable to achieve this distinction in themselves, had reached it through their children. Levi Leiter, Paran Stevens, half a dozen others whom he had either known or heard of, had had the reflected glory of marrying their children into the highest circles in the world. There was no reason why he shouldn't have the same; or there had been no reason till Theo . . .

And now Spen. . . .

Helen Allenby wouldn't have him for the reason that Theo . . .

But he, Jackson Blent, had made his way in life by never accepting defeat. When one issue failed he turned to seek another. If Theo had wrecked the first part of his hopes and Helen Allenby the second, he had visions of a future still more glorious, and, by God! he would bring them to pass. When Theo had been starved into surrender and the man had been bought off, she would be much more easily bent to the question of a second match. For that he would pack up bag and baggage and go and camp in England. Up to the present he had waited for England to come to him. Now he would himself go to the attack. In that country, so impoverished since the war, there would probably be many a duke—he was only vaguely informed as to the number of English dukes there were—who would be glad of a handsome wife like Theo, as well as of the two million dollars which he would in that case make her dowry. There would be many an earl's daughter favorably inclined to Spen, with the same sum on which to keep up an establish-

ment. Sheila, with a similar credit, would be an asset in reserve. He would not be the first of his kind who, after failing to conquer New York, had gone to the siege of London and captured the innermost citadel. The Allenbys would seem small game to him then, and the memory of the clubs that had blackballed him no more a pain than a toothache of his boyhood.

On the morning after his wakeful night Hannah had put him out in the sun, in a comfortable chair on the semicircular terrace. On a table beside him were a box of perfecto cigars, matches, and an ash tray. The morning paper was in his hands, but his vision of the figure he might cut on that European stage beginning to be reconstructed was more fascinating to him than the news.

To make him more truculent with regard to it there appeared, coming up the steps of the terrace from the garden below, that figure of a country gentleman which was Jackson Blent's despair. Dressed in riding togs rather weather-stained, a riding crop in his hand, a briar-root hanging from a corner of his mouth, Paget Allenby had that air of belonging to the soil rare in an American unless he be a farmer, a cowboy, or a guide in the north woods. The American gentleman is essentially a townsman. He goes to the country for the summer or for a holiday, but he gets back to the asphalt and the office as to his native air. Paget Allenby was a countryman somewhat in the English style. It was his natural style, however, in that he lived on the spot where his forefathers had lived—always with long intervals abroad—for two hundred and fifty years. Hale, tanned, accustomed to the saddle, he still made a pretense at farming the

fifty-odd acres of land to which the name of Allenby Manor was applied.

But Allenby Manor had once covered all the three towns now known as Welbeck, Haddon, and Tilbury. A grant from the Duke of York to Richard Paget Allenby, a kinsman of Anne Hyde's, it had come into the possession of the family in 1673, but had gone the way of most of the other great manors on Long Island and the adjacent mainland. On the sale of the land, piece by piece, eight generations had lived. It was their boast that no Allenby ever worked for a living, and as far as it concerned the actual holders of the Manor none of them ever did. The fatuous tradition once established, they did their best to keep it up. They sold their land, they married wealthy wives, they worked their social eminence, and continued to make their boast. Not till the present generation did its emptiness begin to become apparent.

Of that generation the chief representative took his pipe from his mouth and waved the hand which held it. "Hello, old chap! Heard you were under the weather. Came around to see what the trouble was."

There never was anyone so debonair, but Jackson Blent was mollified only on the surface. "Very kind of you, neighbor." He never took quite the intimate tone that Allenby took with him. "Pull up that chair and sit down. You won't have a cigar, because you've got your pipe."

Allenby dragged by its back a wicker chair that stood some twenty feet away. "Well, what's the hitch?"

"Oh, nothing much. Same old thing. Heart got a little panicky."

"Well, it does, at our age. Go off at the least little

thing. Would with me if I didn't sidestep the thump by following the line of least resistance."

Blent felt suspicious. "What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, well, there's a harder way of taking life as well as an easier way. I find that duty and the easier often jump together."

"Damned if they've done so with me. Most of what I've seen as duty has been hard; and instead of easing up as I grow older it gets harder."

"It always does with a man who has a family of children. Children never take themselves off our hands. Even if they become financially independent, they hand us another set of nuts to crack."

Blent stared. "Shouldn't 'a' thought that you'd have had to feel like that."

"Me? Lord! That's all you know. There's not an hour in the day that I don't have the one or the other of them on my mind, especially since their mother died, and just now I have them both. The boy—"

"Doing very well, isn't he?"

"Yes, from some points of view. But you remember the smash-up he made for us seven years ago."

"I remember that he busted your family traditions by deciding to be an architect."

"Yes, and that was what gave me the tip about the line of least resistance. Gave it to me in the end, that is. At first I kicked like blazes. I hadn't much to leave him, but I thought he could supplement that by marrying a rich wife."

"Well, he could."

"Yes, but he had too much spunk and too much

common sense. I'll tell you what he said one morning, just after he left Yale. We'd been having one of our usual kick-ups. I wanted him to take some money, go round the world, do the old-fashioned grand tour in the modern way, and set up for a gentleman on the Allenby plan; but he said he'd be damned if he'd do anything but go into an office and be an architect."

"And how did that strike you?"

"Like blasphemy—for a day or two."

In the secret places of his heart Blent admired the Allenby tradition. He envied the Allenbys its possession. Had it been a Blent tradition he would have lived and died for it. He would have offered his children up to it as the Hebrews offered theirs to the gods who enjoyed child sacrifice. He could have carried it nobly, too, with just the right touch of playful, half-amused arrogance. But having nothing of the sort, he was proud to live next door to it. It made Old Tilbury more picturesque. Allenby's cynical "for a day or two," was not a little like sacrilege.

"And then, by George!" Allenby went on, reminiscently, "I began to see that Cortlandt was right. Once I'd torn up the Allenby tradition, I'll be hanged if I didn't feel better. 'Go to it, boy,' I said to him then, and that's how he's now got his shingle hung out in Milwaukee."

"You went the whole hog, didn't you, sending him out West?"

"I didn't send him; he went. And now we've just got word that he's going to be married. Girl in his office."

"Hope you're pleased."

"We-ell! From the old point of view I should not have been. From the new—"



"You try to make yourself what damn fools call democratic."

"No; not exactly. I try to remember that Cortlandt's marrying the girl, and not me. He's got to have the say—"

"And you've got to do the thinking."

"There's no thinking for me to do. They've settled everything. My job is to accept. If I didn't accept I could easily have the heart jumping out of my body—"

"Like me, why don't you say?"

"Oh, well! I only know about myself. I've come to understand that up to a certain age a man leads his children and they have to do what he tells them. After a certain age they lead him and he falls in behind. If he doesn't, he worries his old head and weakens his old hulk and plays the mischief with himself, to no purpose. He's the victim always. He isn't their goat; he's his own. More than that, I see the reason. If after having led my own life I was to try and lead Cortlandt's, too, well"—he tapped himself on the heart—"this poor old organ wouldn't stand the racket."

During a minute of silence Jackson Blent felt his ire growing hotter. "Come to read me a lecture in a way that keeps me from talking back. Damnedest impertinence I ever heard of." But this was only to himself, and aloud he continued to be sympathetic. "At any rate, neighbor, you've got Helen."

"Oh, have I? I've got her in the same way that I've got robins in my bit of timber. She's in the house—true. She sits at table and pours the tea and coffee. But the real Helen isn't there. She's off in the air, like the birds."

"What's the trouble with her?"

"Hanged if I can tell you. What's the trouble with all the girls? Do *you* know?"

The question cut so near home that Blent squirmed inwardly and dodged it. "Sometimes seems to me—I don't know anything about it, mind you!—that Helen sort of lacks ideals."

"Lacks ideals! Lord! That's all you know. She's as full of ideals as that thistledown"—he pointed with his riding crop to a fluffy white ball being carried on the breeze—"is full of seed. Trouble is that she doesn't know what her ideals are about. She's all aspiration—without seeing what it is she's aspiring to. That's what I'm up against. I've got to follow her; and she goes it blind."

"Why do you have to follow her?"

"Because she's twenty-five and entitled to find her own way."

"And perhaps come a cropper."

"Then she's got to come it. I can't save her. Best we old ones can do is to tag along behind and pick up the pieces." But again the subject being one on which to do no more than touch and go, he made a swift maneuver. "Well, I must be off. Got Harris, the tree expert, to come and pick out the timber to be cut in my pine grove. Good prices just now, and the grove needs thinning out in any case. Told him I'd meet him there at noon. Glad to find you no worse than I supposed. Oh, and by the way, if you should hear of anyone looking for a big tumbled-down old house for the winter, you might tell him the manor is to let."

But after he had gone Blent indulged himself to a good two minutes of semi-articulate cursing. "Why

didn't he call me a blithering fool, and be done with it? More like a man, it would have been, to name Theo by her name, and not shoot me from behind with his bloody parable. Tag along and pick up the pieces! Be damned if I will. If he can't manage his family, I'll show him that there's some one who can, and the Allenbys can go to blazes."

## Chapter XII

ON the book which Billy Maggs had lent them Theo fell with an avidity she had never shown toward the Bible. Holding it reverently, she read the title-page word by word: *Men Who Are Making America*, by B. C. Forbes. Surely the secret of the "big thing" George was in search of—or she was in search of for George—would be found within these pages. Sitting side by side and holding the volume between them, they had begun to read within ten minutes after George's return from the office.

How can I attain success?

That is what every rational being wants to know.

This book tells in an intimate way how fifty of America's foremost business and financial leaders of the present day have climbed the ladder.

In her excitement she threw her arms around his neck and kissed his lank Nordic cheek. "Oh, George darling, isn't this exactly what we want? When you're a foremost business and financial leader of the day you'll be where you belong."

But the first biographical sketch was disappointing. J. Ogden Armour had never had to climb the ladder of success. He had been born rich. Even though he made himself richer, his methods as a meat-packer could only be an indirect stimulus to George Pevensey. The second sketch was too obscure. Of George F. Baker, apparently, no more than the fruits of his life could be given, but not the plowing or the seed time.

Alfred Bedford, Graham Bell, Andrew Carnegie, were figures of note, but failed in the special suggestion of which they were in need.

But on turning the page and catching a glimpse of the aggressive, good-humored, and pertinacious face which formed the frontispiece to the next life-story, Theo gave a little cry. "Why, here's Mr. Davison! I know him. He's often been down to Blentwood to see father. Let's see what it says about him."

In the experience of Henry Pomeroy Davison Theo found the model of the "big things" George could perform so easily. With perfect technic the tale began at the moment when Davison, then only forty, was summoned by Pierpont Morgan and told that he was to be taken into partnership. This being the high point of any financier's career, the author went on to sketch the stages by which Davison had reached it after a boyhood not without its parallels with George's own.

Like Pevensey himself, Davison came of an honorable family thrown into straits by the loss of parents. Having gained, through the assistance of relatives, the essentials of an education, he found himself at the end of adolescence an errand boy in a bank in his native town. Not long afterward he was runner in another bank, this time in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

By starting early in the morning [wrote Mr. Forbes] and doing as much as possible of his own work before noon, he found time to stand by the bookkeeper and learn from him how to keep books.

"But, George darling, it's so exactly like you that it's amazing. The details are different, of course, but the general trend is the same."



Eagerly she began to read aloud:

"In a few months he was doing most of the work for this bookkeeper, and when the latter was promoted the runner got the job. The new runner was at once taken in hand by Bookkeeper Davison and taught bookkeeping. Then the bookkeeper applied himself to learning all about the teller's work. When the next shift came Davison was able to step up to the tellership, and the runner had been trained to become bookkeeper.

"You see, George, that's the sort of thing you should be looking for. What I'm afraid of is that you're so interested in your bookkeeping that you never think of the next step on."

"Oh, but I do," George declared, with his dragging, soft enunciation. "I know as much of a teller's work as any man can know who hasn't actually been a teller. But you don't understand that Davison's bank was a little place where everyone knew everyone else and just what he could do. But it isn't so in the Hudson River Trust. You've been in there often enough, and you know how many floors there are. No one is noticed especially so long as he does his job. If he doesn't do it he's fired, and if he does he gets his pay at the end of the week without anyone taking the trouble to think that he ought to be promoted. I'm known as a bookkeeper. No one would think of making me a teller unless no more tellers were to be picked up on Wall Street. I can't go to them and say, 'See here, I'm the man you're looking for as teller. . . .'"

But Davison's experience contradicted this, as Theo was quick to read out to him. In getting his first important position he had done the very thing which

George had just said he couldn't do. Resolved to enter New York, and hearing that a new bank was to be opened in Astor Place, he hurried to the city and asked for the situation. Not getting it, he returned next day with the same request. Not getting it the second day, he came back again on the third. "I know I am the man you want for paying teller. I can help you." The place was promised him.

"If you could only find out where they're going to start a new bank, George, and do *that!*"

For long afterward she brooded over this example. It was so simple. You displayed the energy that was in you—and at forty you became a partner of Pierpont Morgan's. George could do it as easily as not, if he only would. That he should be so slow in making the attempt distressed her as she went about the city looking for apartments.

This was depressing work, but it was all she had to do to pass her time. Since no more communications came from home, and even Sheila was dumb, she knew her father's veto must be strict. George's money was ebbing. A humble flat in which she must do the work was becoming Hobson's choice, unless he could bring deliverance by some mighty stroke. It so hurt her that he didn't, when she knew he could, that to drag from one seedy tenement to another took her mind away from her resentment.

But a message from Mrs. Maggs deprived her of this resource. Mrs. Maggs was sure she had what they wanted, and that they needn't look any further. They were to come for the inspection on the following Sunday afternoon, and stay to supper. It would be Theo's presentation in the new social order of which she had become a member.

To Mr. and Mrs. Maggs it was a friendly invitation to extend, and to George a friendly invitation to accept. But to Theo it was an affair of frightening trepidation. How should she comport herself? What would be the etiquette? For the first time it struck her that the new social order would have conventions of its own as stringent as those of the world out of which she had come. Just as a girl married above her station might betray herself by amusing and unexpected errors, so she might do the same. George could tell her nothing. There was nothing, he declared, to tell. You went in and sat down. The other people did the rest. No, they didn't do it in the way things were done at Blentwood, but he couldn't explain the difference. All she need do was to sit still and see. The journey to Brooklyn to a girl who had not been in a New York subway half a dozen times in her life was in itself a token of descent. They entered a car in which every place was occupied, and clung to straps. On the strap next to Theo's two Chinamen hung, while in front of her a row of colored children filled the seats. Everywhere else were the swarthy, furtive-eyed faces of Slavs, Greeks, Italians, Jews, people bound, like themselves, on mild Sunday dissipations. She had no reason to object to them. They had the same right there as she. George, who was used to this method of conveyance, took them for granted. He whispered that at the next station she would probably get a seat. Seeing nothing strange in this awful promiscuity, he thought that the lack of a seat was the cause of her distress.

To be back in the open air reconciled her somewhat to the meanness of the streets they traversed in order to reach the home of Mr. and Mrs. Maggs. Her only

experience of Brooklyn hitherto had been an occasional visit to some one living in the dignified backwater known as the Heights. But here there were rows of dreary brick dwellings which seemed to have suffered the sinister change which comes over second-hand clothes. Children played, screeched, and squabbled everywhere. Papers flew in the wind, or drifted in dirty piles into the angles formed by doorsteps. At many of the open windows men sat in shirt sleeves, smoking and reading the Sunday news. Theo clung to her husband and shuddered.

"But, George, we shouldn't have to come and live in a slum like this?"

"This isn't a slum, dear. It's a perfectly respectable neighborhood, where rents are high. But you know as well as I do that the city authorities don't keep the streets even where rich people live any too clean, and when it comes to those who are not so well off, why, they just let them choke in dirt."

They approached a high gray cube, looking like a warehouse, stuccoed in rough cement. "This is Billy's."

On the wall of the small vestibule was a speaking tube and a telephone receiver. There was also a row of mail boxes above each of which was an electric bell-button surmounted by a name. George did the speaking.

"Here we are, Elma. It's George Pevensey speaking." He turned to Theo. "She says to come right up."

The inner hall had none of the palatial grandeur to which Theo was accustomed in the apartment houses to which she sometimes went in Park Avenue. There were no rugs on the floor, no gilded settees against

the walls, no flunkys in waiting. The stairs and walls in gray cement might have been those of a jail. Like a jail, too, were the rows of doors, close together all down the length of corridors. There was no lift, but George explained that Billy's apartment was only two flights up.

Elma, a big, beaming, loosely-breasted woman, of the type which takes the world easily, opened the door. "Hello, George! Come in, dearie, come in!"

Having shaken hands, she led the way through the narrowest passage Theo had ever entered. Halfway to the sitting room an open wardrobe trunk, its two parts flat against the wall and covered with a piece of pink calico, compelled her to squeeze sideways. The sitting room in which Maggs was waiting was likewise the smallest space she had ever seen inclosed by walls, unless it was a closet for hanging clothes. When all four of them were in it they knocked against one another. An armchair, a table, two small chairs, and a couch were enough to furnish it, and leave little or no standing room. The floor was covered with a bright-hued Japanese matting which simulated one of the gaudier kinds of Oriental rugs. As the room gave on a court, the shades were drawn and the electric lights turned on.

Maggs, a tall, thin fellow, suggesting a daddy-long-legs, welcomed the bride with some embarrassment. As the daughter of the Big Chief she was a princess in exile, but a princess all the same. Not daring to take with her the tone of jocose persiflage he generally adopted toward lady friends, he had no other to put in its place. He would hardly have had the composure to say, "Pleased to meet you," and to ask her to sit



down had not Elma's *savoir faire* put everyone at ease.

As first assistant to a well-established milliner in Forty-ninth Street near Fifth Avenue, Elma was, as they all phrased it, "used to company." That is, she knew how to address the great, and on something like equal terms. The equality was implied in the word "dearie." The young ladies used it both among themselves and to customers. It had a leveling quality. Even those customers who at first were restive came to accept it meekly as part of the process of getting a becoming hat.

On the present occasion it bridged over all kinds of distances, filling in the chasms dug by the silence of the men as well as by the social helplessness with which Theo suddenly found herself stricken. She heard Mrs. Maggs's questions, and knew she returned intelligible answers, but she did it as if in the first stages of going under ether. The world she had known seemed melting away from her, while new conditions were coming in their place. It might have been from a spell of unconsciousness that she came back to see George and Billy Maggs sitting side by side on the couch, while Elma confronted her with smiles.

"Of course, dearie, I don't know whether it's a housekeeping apartment that you want or one for light housekeeping."

Not knowing the difference between these terms, Theo learned that light housekeeping would only enable her to boil an egg and make the coffee for breakfast, while housekeeping meant all the privileges of living.

"Oh, housekeeping," she answered then. "I

shouldn't like George to be running about for his dinner."

"I don't blame you," Mrs. Maggs laughed, "but there's a lot to be said on the other side, too. You get awful sick of doing the same thing at the same hour every day, and thinking out what you can give the brute to eat that'll be different. And as for washing up afterward—but I will say for Billy that he's very good at that himself, even if he does nick a plate now and then."

Moreover, the day was punctuated with small happenings which kept you from being lonesome. In that particular neighborhood there was a specially nice set of young men, chatty, obliging, and not too fresh. Fresh they would be sometimes, each and every one of them, but if you gave them as good as you got they soon came to respect you and let up on the sauce. "Sauce the goose, and the gander'll get it all over him," was an aphorism of Mrs. Maggs's own, and she recommended it.

As the men roared at this piece of wit, as well as at the jolly assurance with which Elma delivered it, Theo felt obliged to smile, though she did it feebly.

"But what do they do, the young men?" she asked, when the laugh was over. "What do they come for?"

The laugh burst out again. They came because they were the grocer, the meatman, the fishman, the iceman, the laundryman, with plumbers and electricians as incidentals. They sure did keep you busy. No matter what you were doing in the kitchen, or how you were dressed, or what state your hair was in, you had to face them. You got used to them, however, just as you did to a doctor. If Theo settled in the neighborhood, she, Elma, would furnish her with a

list of the places at which to deal, with the good and bad points of each. The meatman would be the one who most needed watching—had a knack of cutting the joint so as to give you all the bone he could possibly include, while the young man who came on the delivery team was strong in the quality she designated sauce. "But sauce him back once or twice, and he'll flatten out like a rubber sole, and next time bring you what you order."

By the time these young men had been canvassed, with their names, their looks, and their characteristics, Theo began to feel bewildered. "Didn't you say, Mrs. Maggs, that you knew of an apartment we could go and see?"

"Yes, dearie, and if I was a young couple just settling down I don't know a spot I'd consider choicier."

She explained further. It was in their own street, not far away, an old private residence being turned into four of the dearest little flats. The lowest two were taken, and so was the one at the top; the one on the third floor was free.

"What's the rent?" George asked, his first thought always on that point.

"Sixty-five, which I should say was just about your price. We pay seventy, but this apartment is exceptional. It's no use saying it isn't, because it is. It's got everything in it that you need to have, and I can be all over it in a flash. Wouldn't you like to see it?" she asked of Theo, getting up and leading the way into the dining room.

It was all on the scale of the sitting room. The dining room was smaller, the kitchen smaller still, the bedroom of a size to hold the double bed and not much else besides. Elma had said she could be all

over it in a flash, but a flash was too long. One quick glance was enough.

But she and Billy were proud of it. That was what Theo was impressed with most. To them it represented space, comfort, a certain elegance. They asked no more; with more they wouldn't have known what to do. In a house like Blentwood they would have been as flustered as a black ant in a beehive. As George had so often pointed out, it was a question of scale, and the scale was what you were used to. If you were used to constriction you could stand being crowded like a snail into its shell; but if you were not . . .

On the way to view the new apartment Billy and Elma tactfully walked ahead. It was Billy who insisted on this, because he was shy with the Big Chief's daughter, who looked out of place in her surroundings. In what her superiority consisted it was difficult to say, and yet even chance passers-by could see that she didn't belong to Butter Street. She herself felt as alien there as a bird from the tropics caged in a parlor in the north.

But George was at home. She seized that fact with a certain poignancy. This was the background he understood. In Elma's sitting room, so cramped and grotesque to her, he could relax and be himself. She recalled his appearance that morning at Blentwood, a big, handsome animal, dazed and cowed by those outward signs of wealth which to her were commonplace. It was she now who was dazed and cowed in conditions which to him were natural. A sob rose within her, and a big question. Could either transcend what habit and circumstance had decreed for them? Was love sufficient for this miracle? Should

she ever so dominate her instincts, tastes, and training as to become like Elma Maggs, able to give the meatman and the fishman as good as they gave her?

When the Maggses were beyond earshot George asked, anxiously, "How did you like them?"

Had she answered truthfully she would have said that between them and herself she felt not a single point of contact. They were out of her world. They belonged to the horde she used to call invisible, because they had nothing to do with her, nor she with them, beyond the rounds of their service. That she should now be one of them was the kind of irony to which she found it hardest to be meek.

But she must give the answer George was hoping for. "I thought they were charming."

He beamed happily. "Was sure you would. Elma's an awfully good sport. Be lots of help to you."

The old residence transformed into new apartments had a new cemented front and a new flight of steps. But the stairs within sagged toward the center of the house as a ship's companionway in a cross-roll sea. So with the floor of the apartment to which they climbed. The feet had always the discomfort of walking down a gentle slope or walking up one. But the flat itself was bright, the rooms were tolerably large, and windows broadened to a flimsy picturesqueness let in the daylight. All was arranged to catch the eye. A cheerful sitting room was connected by a passageway, off which there was a bathroom, with a cheerful bedroom. The kitchen was a former hall bedroom, now connected with the sitting room.

"But I don't see the dining room," Theo said, with some wonder.

Elma laughed. "There's your dining room."



At the kitchen window a small deal table, just big enough for two, a fixture in the floor, had on each side a high-backed settle, likewise a fixture in the floor, just big enough for one. To Elma's standards, which were George's too, the arrangement was a cozy one; but Theo only gasped. As to eating in the kitchen, she had vague ideas of indignity. At Blentwood even the servants had their dining room. But when Elma explained the advantages, she had sense enough to see that they were sound. The arrangement would "save her steps." She came to understand that saving steps was a consideration to a woman doing her own housework. Moreover, they would only use this "dining room" when she and George were alone. If they had "company" it would be a simple matter to lay the table in the sitting room, near to the kitchen door, where the service would be easy. Theo found herself becoming reconciled.

She had seen her future home. Before they went downstairs it was arranged that George should sign the lease. On the way back to the Maggses' he was exultant, while she played at exultation in order to hide from him her feeling that somehow life had trapped her. Once he had signed the lease, there would be no help for her, and it was only common sense that he should sign it.

Supper was a new experience. From the arm-chair in the corner of the sitting room she watched Elma bustling between dining room and kitchen with the sureness of movement which combined the saving of steps with the highest degree of efficiency. This same thing she herself would be doing if they ever came to entertaining guests. How should she learn this art of being hostess, cook, and waitress all in one,

and swing the three so easily? Each time Elma appeared in the dining room she had some quip to fling at the men before disappearing again into the kitchen. Light at heart, light on her feet, light in her methods, there was none of the drudgery in anything she did which Theo connected with housework. Elma made it as simple and natural as singing, and as sweet.

"I never could."

There was more than conviction in Theo's silent assertion; there was tragedy. For the first time it occurred to her to think that her life had been buoyed up by service. She had sailed on service as a ship sails on the sea. A whole ocean of service rolled beneath her and supported her. Without this support it seemed to her that she must sink. She felt herself sinking.

When Elma laid the cloth George suggested to Theo that perhaps she might lend a hand. She jumped at once. It was evidently part of the new etiquette.

"Can't I do something? I'd love to."

Elma bore from the kitchen an elephant of which the back had been hollowed and filled with pansies, placing it on the table as a centerpiece. "No, dearie; you'd only get in my way. Got everything down to a fine point. System's what counts in work like this. Then it's no trouble." But she relented. "Well, you can do this." Opening a velvet-lined drawer in the small service table, she displayed her silverware. "You can lay a knife and a fork, a teaspoon and a dessert spoon, at each of the four places."

Theo's thoughts went back to the great Heppelwhite sideboard in the dining room at Blentwood with its heaps of silver, so much more than they ever used, so much more, her mother often said, than they knew

what to do with. There was not only the old Spencer silver which her mother had inherited, but all the acquisitions of her father. Trays, tureens, salvers, cups were emblazoned with the arms of families of whom they knew nothing except that they once were great. But Elma's treasures consisted of three tablespoons, six dessert spoons, six teaspoons, neatly arranged in sets. The teaspoons might have been silver, but the others, she was sure, were in electroplate. A half a dozen knives and forks lay together in a handful. With a little pang she supposed that in this way she herself would be supplied; but she fought down regrets to give herself to laying the places with precision.

"Come along, folks."

Elma's cheery summons, as she whisked back again into the kitchen, took the place of Hannah's dignified, "Dinner is served." The two men lumbered forward, seating themselves without ceremony. There was no ceremony at Blentwood when the family was alone, and yet in subtle ways there was. It was the ceremony of unceremoniousness, a variant on the statelier measure, with the statelier measure implied. But here there was only a frank simplicity in which no small attentions were paid to either Elma or herself. She pulled out her own chair and sat in it. Once they were seated, the undisguised objective was that of getting food.

The first part of supper consisted of cold chicken and a vegetable salad. In addition there were rolls, which Elma had rewarmed in the gas oven. Elma poured the tea, but the milk and sugar were passed from individual to individual. "Do you use sugar?" "Do you use milk?" Comments followed on the tastes of those who either accepted or declined. Billy Maggs told an anecdote of an aunt of his—he called

her his "ant"—who, after taking both milk and sugar for eighty years, suddenly refused them both, thereafter taking her tea as black as ink till her death at ninety-six.

George said little; Theo nothing at all. In such remarks as went round there was nothing she could take hold of. Elma's ventures were mostly on the difficulty of getting good chickens in that part of Brooklyn. To secure the present offering she had gone nearly all the way to Borough Hall, and was not sure even now that they had sent her the one she had selected.

"Don't it taste stringy to you, dearie? It does to me. The next time I'm over in that direction I'll go to that piker and tell him I'll take my trade away from him."

With the sweet there was more gayety. It was a toothsome sweet, and they all enjoyed it. George's liking for it stirred in Theo's breast the first impulse of desire to stand over a hot stove.

"Nothing's easier than to make it," Elma assured her. "Awful handy, too, at a time like this when you don't want to fuss about because of having company. If you like I'll scribble you the recipe right now."

In spite of Theo's protests Elma sprang up, found a sheet of paper and a pencil, and, uttering the words as she set them down, wrote on a corner of the table.

" 'Arrange slices of orange on the bottom of a dish—cover with boiled custard—after it has chilled spread over with meringue—' Elma pronounced it me-ring—'or a marshmallow sauce.' There you are! Nothing simpler! I like the marshmallow because I think it's tastier, but you can have me-ring just as



well. A good deal of the success is in the boiled custard, and that's a thing you can't teach anyone to make. It takes a hand. If you don't have the hand . . ."

On going home in the subway George's pleasure was such that she was obliged to play up to it. She had made a good impression. He told her what Elma had said of her. "A sweet little thing, not a bit stuck up, who'll fit right into our own gang." To poor George's simplicity this was praise. He couldn't have been happier over it had Elma been a duchess.

Wearily she told him again how delightful they were, how kind, how competent. Though her heart was screaming that they were all as alien to her as Eskimos, she chatted as if they had been coming home from dinner at the Brookshires'. Ah, God, the Brookshires! How dull she had found them with their everlasting talk of polo, of horses, of races, of Ascot, of Chantilly, of Longchamp, of Epsom, of courses where the big world forgathers! But it *was* the big world. After all, that had been the charm of it. There *were* things to talk about. There were people to talk *to*. They turned up in Old Tilbury from India, from China, from exploring in Tibet, from climbing the Canadian Rockies, from buying mines in South America, from feeding the hungry in Russia, from testing the old masters' pigments in Italy or Spain. It was the big life, and only now was she coming to understand that it had been hers. She had turned her back on it for a world in which the meatman, the iceman, the laundryman were the heroic denizens, and where talk ran on chickens and marshmallow sauce.

It was a new slant on what George had defined as the difference between her point of view and his



own. In her world, according to George, there was a liberty to *do* which was not in his. But there was also a liberty to think, to talk, to let the imagination roam. All that afternoon the imagination had been closed, shut in, with no power of free movement. Poor Elma could only chatter of chickens and marshmallow sauce because life gave her so little else to think about. Once they had spoken of a motion-picture play, but not with much interest. Once there had been an allusion to President Wilson's going to Versailles, but so languidly that the subject dropped. The most animated reference was to Lemuella Burrage's high-heeled shoes and Alfred's miserly thrift. George should have pointed out to her that one ruling difference between her kind of people and his was that with his the imagination was atrophied.

Nevertheless, on leaving the subway and walking through the sweet, cool night toward their hotel she continued to extol their hosts of the afternoon and their entertainment.

"I don't see how she does it. Even in so simple a meal as that there were fifty things for her to think of, and she thought of them all in the right rotation, without forgetting one of them. I don't see how I shall ever—"

As she clung to him he pressed her hand with his arm. "It can't be so hard, when most of the women in the country are doing it."

She mused a little before answering. "Isn't it like speaking a language? If you've never heard any other from your birth it comes to you easily, even if it's Russian or Chinese. But if you only begin to study it when you're twenty-five . . ."

Late that night, after he had dropped off to sleep,

he waked to hear her sobbing in the neighboring bed. She cried so rarely—he had never heard her cry before—that he could scarcely believe that he heard aright. Listening, he was sure that she was trying to control herself by pressing a handful of the sheet against her lips.

In a second he was out of bed, kneeling beside her and holding her in his arms. "Darling, what's the matter? What's the matter? Haven't we had a lovely day, and aren't you happy over it? Tell me. What can I do? There, there! Darling! Darling!"

With her head on his shoulder and self-control thrown off, she cried recklessly. The deeps of her being were broken up. All the restraints of the day, and of all the days since she had fled from the home she loved, were loosed at once. She sobbed and sobbed. He had never heard such sobbing. He had never known such an outpouring of long-stifled misery. All he could do was to hold her and wait for the flood to exhaust itself.

She spoke at last, broken words, heart-stricken words, but nevertheless articulate. "Oh, George, *won't* you do something big—that'll take us out of this and away from all these people?"

But they didn't sleep on that. Getting up from his knees and sitting on the side of her bed, he talked to her. He talked with gentle reason and common sense. He told her he would do what he could, but while she wasn't to despair of him, she was not to think him the giant and the genius she supposed him to be. He was only a stupid fellow and a bookkeeper. Because he was, he had warned her not to marry him. But now that she had done it and there was no help for it, wasn't there also a sweet compensation? There

was their love. There was the bright little home they had looked at that afternoon. There would be the cozy meals together at the little table with the settles. There would be his parting kiss in the morning and his returning kiss each afternoon. Life might be narrow, but it could be good, especially with such kind friends as she had met that day.

They talked far toward morning, and she grew comforted. She couldn't help being comforted when she had him, for he was all that counted. Drifting at last toward the borderland of sleep, she found herself saying: "I must—I *must*—learn how to make boiled custard and marshmallow sauce, when I can see that he's so fond of them."

But in his bed George was saying to himself: "So, after all, she didn't find that Billy and Elma were her sort."

### *Chapter XIII*

THEO learned to make boiled custard and marsh-mallow sauce, and many other things. She learned how to fill all the hard and menial tasks to which most women in the country have to give themselves. She cooked and swept and washed and scrubbed as if she had been brought up to it. Through a winter of mistakes she achieved by spring an efficiency which both Elma and Lemuella declared marvelous.

For one thing, as she often reminded herself, she must have had an inherited instinct for just these duties. All the Blent women had performed them as far back as there had been Blent women in the world. Even her father, up to the time of marrying her mother when he was twenty-four, had "done chores" about his house. She sprang from no royal line, nor even a line of nobles. It was only that by some queer hereditary kink the Blents were imbued with a love of the grand style which even nobles couldn't always carry off. They could do menial work, if menial work was to be done, because they were so endowed that they could do anything; but they did it as tsars and kings submit to imprisonment, with a sense that some sacred quality is being outraged.

All that winter, in the little flat in Butter Street, Theo did what other women in the street were doing, and, all things considered, she did it well. From Elma she learned system; from Lemuella she took fruitless lessons in economy. But the effort seemed

to burn her up. She grew thin, wisp-like. She grew nervous, too, with bursts of her hot temper which alarmed, and sometimes humiliated, George. The great dark eyes which used to blaze only at times now blazed always, with a fire that nothing could put out.

"Darling, it's too much for you," George said to her one day. "Let's give it up and try something else. You wouldn't find boarding so bad."

"Oh, it isn't this," she tried to make him understand. "It's—it's the family. They know where I am, but not since that little bundle of house linen which came from Sheila when we settled here in October has there been a word."

He ventured, sadly, "And you miss your old life too, don't you?"

"I miss it, yes; but not so much. You're my life, George. The old doesn't matter."

"But if I'm your life," he ventured again, "I don't see why my friends can't be your friends."

"Well, they are. I'm nice to them. Don't you think I am?"

In his sunny smile there was an infusion of regret. "You're nice to them—but aloof."

"I'm aloof because I can't get near them. I do my best. I talk kitchen economy with Elma and Lemuella till there's not another word to be said about it; but after that none of us has anything to say."

"That's it. You've nothing in common."

"But, George, how can we have? All I am to your friends who look in on us on a Sunday afternoon—I'm not speaking now of the Maggses and Burrages—is an object of curiosity as the Big Chief's daughter, a kind of leopardess in a cage. They don't care any-



thing about me, any more than I do about them. It's our minds that are in other worlds."

Though they left it at that, she was sorry not to meet his wishes more whole-heartedly. Only little by little was she beginning to understand his identification with his social order. She had once thought of taking him out of it, and had not relinquished the ambition even now; but, while he never said so, the idea was beginning to dawn on her that he didn't want to come. These people were a kind of religion to him, a kind of church. His sympathy with the disabilities which the social organism forced on them would always keep him true. The very limitations that made chickens and marshmallow sauce subjects of vital concern were those which appealed to his loyalty. She admired this so much that, had she been able to cross the gulf and join him in his stand, she would have done it; but she knew she never would be able.

And yet when she tried to minimize the difference between one class and another he did not agree with her. "For me," he said, "to go in among your lot would have been hard, but I could have done it. For you to come in among mine is so impossible that it's killing you."

Though the deep wine-red had almost vanished from her dark cheeks, it surged back again. He had said so exactly what she often said herself that she trembled.

"Killing me? What do you mean by that?"

"Darling! Can't I see? I don't know how we're to go on."

She threw back her head in her daring way. "But we shall go on."

And they did go on. They went on till a certain

Sunday afternoon in spring when he felt obliged to touch upon a weak spot in her domestic management. Between husbands and wives it was not an unusual spot to touch on, and in this case was dangerous chiefly because she was at the end of her nervous endurance. In the sparsely furnished flat they sat at the one desk, bills and account books before them.

"You see, dear, our expenses for the last month have averaged something like sixty a week; and we've only forty-five."

She groaned aloud. "Oh, that forty-five! I'm so sick of hearing the figures."

"So am I, dear, but—"

"Then why don't you do something else? Why don't you throw up this job and take a better one. I'm certain you could find it."

"You're certain because you don't know."

"Oh, but I do know! When they'd heard what you'd done in the war, and saw you were lame, and so good-looking—"

Though he, too, was nervously excited, he did his best to laugh. "It wouldn't help me to get another job, not if I was Apollo and had won the Victoria Cross. If I was to chuck this place, do you know how I should get a new one?"

"No, but there must be ways."

"Yes, and I'll tell you what they are. First, I should begin going round among the fellows I know saying I was out of a job and asking if they knew of any vacancies. They probably wouldn't; but if they did the places would most likely be filled before I applied. There are always so many—"

"Oh, if you're going to be discouraged to begin with!"

"I'm not discouraged to begin with. It's just that for fellows like me the only pluck is in hanging on to a sure thing. But after I'd gone the rounds of my friends I'd begin looking up advertisements. I'd answer them. Some of them wouldn't suit me; some of them I shouldn't suit; or some one would be ahead of me. I'd begin going round to banks and offices. They'd be civil, and put me off. They'd tell me to look in again, and I'd look in again, only to find nothing doing. I'd go on that way for weeks. I'd grow ashamed. I'd be heartsick. No one who hasn't been through it can understand the low-down feeling of the jobless man in looking for a job. It makes you feel a misfit in a world where everyone else fits. You go hungry. You grow shabby. Your boots give out first. You get footsore. They hate to see you coming into offices, with your hang-dog look. You hate to go in yourself. You only do it because there's no other way. And in the end—"

"In the end you get something."

"Yes, in the end you get something, but nine times out of ten something not half so good as what you threw away so easily. And, darling, there's some one far worse off than the fellow looking for a job, and that's his wife."

He tried to explain the wife's situation. The man could go out and hustle while she had to wait at home. He got action; she had nothing but suspense. While he was out she hoped and prayed that the new job would be found to-day; but when he came back with the cowed look in his eyes . . . He had seen them so often, those wives of jobless men. . . .

"You see, darling, your father was right. In a way I'm caught."

She was still in her bitter mood. "Oh, if you're caught, what about me?"

His enunciation dragged more liquidly. "Yes, you're caught, too; only I'm caught in a way I can't get out of, whereas you—"

Throwing some emphasis on the *you*, he did not dare to go on. She did not dare to take him up. But they looked at each other, searchingly, each with a suspicion. He was caught, and could not get out; she was caught, but she could. Only—how?

They were still looking at each other, and still silent, when a strange noise reached them from the landing outside. It was a stamping, puffing noise, with what seemed a muttering of smothered oaths. Then there was a pull at the bell which nearly tore the wire down. Theo reached the door first, and opened it.

"Father!"

Red, apoplectic, his hand against his heart as if to stop its thumping, he pushed his way in.

"Chair!"

George pushed forward their one armchair. Blent dropped into it, his hat on the floor on one side, his stick on the floor on the other, according to his wont.

"Damn those stairs! Why don't you have a lift?"

But Theo was on her knees beside him, her hands raised to his shoulders. "Papa! Papa! You've come at last!"

## *Chapter XIV*

As Theo knelt before him Blent took her face between his hands and peered down into it.

"So this is you! This is what it's made of you! I didn't think you could have changed so much!"

"I haven't changed at heart, papa."

"Haven't you? I hoped you might have." Puffing for breath, he pushed her gently away from him. "Get up."

When she had risen, he looked round about on the apartment. "Is this all the place you're got to live in?" For fuller inspection he dragged himself to his feet, glancing into the bedroom first, and then into the kitchen. "Do you eat there?" he asked, pointing to the table with the settles.

She nodded, but said nothing.

With his capacity for detail, for domestic detail especially, nothing escaped him. Stumbling back toward the armchair, he uttered a kind of groan.

"So this is what you've come to!"

With the arrogance peculiar to the Blents he took no notice of George, who backed away to the window seat, where he lounged as if merely curious. Theo stood before her father with that air of dispute and self-defense which had once delighted him.

"I'm only living as the Blents have always lived, papa—that is, before your time."

"You know nothing whatever of the way the Blents



have lived; and even if you did, we don't go backward, we go forward. For you to have to pig it like this—"

"But I'm happy doing it."

"Don't tell me that. I can see you're not. No one can be happy with a face like yours."

She shifted her ground. "If I'm not happy, it isn't because of anything here. It's"—she choked back a sob—"it's because I've been cut off from home."

"And whose fault is that? We didn't cut you off. You knew what you were doing when you turned your back on us."

"I knew what you said I'd be doing; but I didn't believe—"

"And that's where you had to learn. You defied me. You took advantage of the fact that I'd always been a kind father to you."

"I didn't take advantage; I trusted."

"Defiance isn't trust. You thought you'd put me in a position where I couldn't help myself."

"I thought I'd put myself in a position where your love would come to my aid."

"That is, you were to do nothing to please me, while for you I was to do everything. Wasn't that it?"

It was so nearly it that for the moment Theo found herself nonplused. Again she was obliged to shift her ground.

"What you don't take into consideration, father, is that I was in love with George."

"I don't care who you were in love with. To be in love with some one isn't an excuse for plunging yourself and your whole family into misery. What kind of a world would it be if we all made love an excuse

for breaking people's hearts? You don't know what you've done to us, Theo."

It was a new angle. She knew what the family had done to her, but that she had done anything to them beyond marrying in a way they disapproved of she had not understood. They retained everything—money, home, comfort, all the social amenities. She had left them behind, renouncing everything. How could they suffer in any way that compared with herself? They had their assuagement beforehand.

His recital of their grief astonished her. Her treason so preyed on her mother's mind that the poor woman might almost be called demented. She seemed to have lost the rule and reason of life. If she went into a room she forgot what she went for; and if she remembered what she went for, she forgot what she meant to do with it. Only two or three days previously she had astonished a departing caller, with whom she had been talking for half an hour, by saying: "Oh, how do you do? Won't you sit down and have a cup of tea?" The embarrassed visitor, not knowing for a minute whether she should go or begin her call all over again, had made the incident a joke in every house in Old Tilbury. But that would give Theo some idea. Never having had much sense at any time, her poor mother was now like a crazed hen, and Theo was responsible.

Sheila had grown thin and old and looked like a girl of twenty-three. Fretting for her sister and worrying about her mother, she had lost the hawthorn pink of her complexion, and perhaps would never get it back again. In as far as affection would allow of it she had also turned against her father, resenting what she called his brutal use of power. He

had been obliged to be sterner with her than he had ever meant to be with any child of his, in order to keep her from rebellion and disobedience. He had forbidden her the use of motor cars, and in a scene most distressing to himself had extracted her promise not to write to her sister, or try to see her, without communicating with him first. Sheila had been true to her word, but it was easy to see that she felt bitterly.

Spen perhaps suffered more than anyone. Theo had no idea how much her brother cared for her. He wouldn't show it while she was at home; but now that she was gone, it preyed on the poor boy's mind. To make matters worse, Helen Allenby had turned him down—why, God alone knew!—so that he had more or less lost his nerve. As a proof of this loss of nerve, Blent cited the fact that Spen had withdrawn his name from the list of candidates for the Cold River Club, where he could have had hunting. Influential members had assured him that his chances of election were extremely good; but the scandal caused by the Pevensey marriage had been such that, fearing some supercilious blackball, Spen had backed down of his own accord.

“As for myself, I don't want to speak. I should be what is called a broken man, only that I'm not a man to be broken. I haven't reached my age without having had a good many setbacks, but I've never believed I was beaten and I never have been. When one way has failed, I've always found another.”

During his monologue Theo dropped on a small chair where she sat facing him. “But, father, what sense is there in making everyone unhappy when—?”

“That's a question I must ask you. It's you who've done it. What did you do it for? Millions of women

have been in love with unsuitable men and have given them up."

"And spoiled their lives."

His grunt was meant to be a laugh. "And have you made such a big success of yours? Is there ever an hour in the day when the question isn't in your mind as to how you're going to stick it out? One winter of it is all very well; you can put it through, even if it half kills you. But next winter will be like it, only perhaps worse. And there'll be the winter after that, and the winter after that, and the winter after that; and by that time, judging by the way you look to-day, you'll be a haggard old woman—if you're alive at all. Don't forget what I've just said. You can always go forward. It's going with nature. To go backward is to run counter to all the forces of life. You can never stem them, even though you think you're going to. They'll knock you about, and dash you to pieces, and make the freshest and rosiest—look like you."

So many words left him spluttering and coughing. "Confounded stairs," he muttered, when he got his breath. "Should never have come here. Wouldn't ha' done it only I wanted—"

"I hope you wanted to see me, papa."

"I did—and I'm sorry now I have. Face is going to haunt me. Can't think what I'll say to the family when I get home. Don't want to stab 'em, the way your eyes stab me."

She mused over this, saying at last, "But I'm sure you didn't come to make me more unhappy than I am."

"No, I didn't—not if you take my offer."

"If it's an offer for me to leave George—"

"Better hear it first. Won't get anywhere by telling

me what it is before I've told you." He glared round the room as he had done already. "Well, you've tried this out. You're pretty well fed up with it. In a way it was sprung on you. You didn't expect it. Thought I'd intervene before you could come such a cropper. If you'd foreseen it you'd have looked a good many ways at once before you'd have had the courage to face it. Well, all I'm suggesting is to put you back where you'll have a chance to reconsider."

"But it's too late to reconsider—some things."

"That we should have to see. Not deciding anything beforehand. What I propose is that you should come home for a three months' visit."

"Do you mean a visit and nothing more?"

"I mean a visit, with whatever comes of it. If after three months with us you decide that you want to come back to *this* you'd be free to do it. But if you decided to stay, we should all be glad to have you. The—the man wouldn't suffer—not if—not if"—even for him the offer was difficult to put into words—"if a hundred thousand dollars—*two* hundred thousand dollars—would do him any good."

Over her father's shoulder Theo glanced at George, who, lounging on the window seat, stared idly outward, as if these matters were no concern of his.

"It's awfully sweet of you, papa. I should love to go home for a little while." Before her next thought she paused, seeking the right terms. "But I couldn't do it if it was implied in my doing so that I might end in leaving George. The only way I could go would be on the understanding that I was definitely coming back."

"To this pigsty?"

"To my husband."



"Who can only offer you—"

"I take what he can offer me and make the best of it."

"Which is this."

"Which is this—for now."

"And always will be. Don't think that he'll ever be able to give you anything better, because he won't."

"He'll be my husband just the same."

He wiped his brow of the beads of sweat that started out on it. "My God! Theo, do you mean to say that you put him before the whole lot of us, who've loved and cherished you all your life? Why, it's monstrous!"

"Father, I don't think I could ever make you understand what a husband is to the wife who loves him. It's different from what his wife is to a man. I think most men could at a pinch give up one wife and take another, or do without any at all. But it's different with a woman. When she's given herself to a man, with her soul and heart and body—well, it's final."

"So that's your answer?" He picked up his hat from one side of his chair, and his stick from the other. "You don't want to reconsider anything. What you did in haste you confirm at leisure, and give us up again."

"The choice you offer me is too hard, papa. When a woman has to choose between her husband and her family, she doesn't choose. There's only one way she can turn."

He struggled heavily to his feet. "All right! All right! You're not coming." His sigh was almost a groan. "I'll go back and tell your mother—and Sheila—and Spen. Make 'em pretty sick, but they'll have to

grin and bear it. But there's one thing I can say right now, that whatever happens, you needn't expect that I'll tag behind and pick up the pieces. Hanged if I will! I'm through."

Without further farewell he was lumbering toward the door, when she said, gently, "Won't you kiss me, papa?"

He turned. "Well! If you like."

But when he felt her arms round his neck he held her with desperate closeness. "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

"Papa! Papa!"

It was all that either could say till they tore themselves from each other. Blent had his hand on the doorknob when he was arrested by hearing Pevensey's slow, liquid voice, which was new to him. George was now standing up, though without moving away from the window.

"Would it be possible, sir, to consider your kind offer as left open for Theo to think over again?"

She spoke sharply: "What would be the good of that? I couldn't change my mind."

He still addressed the father. "It's come on her so suddenly that she hasn't had time to look at the thing in any of its bearings but one."

"But, George, that one is enough."

"I don't say," George went on, "that there's any chance of her reaching a decision different from the one she's made; but then the matter has so many sides—"

"Very well, dear," Blent broke in, speaking only to his daughter. "Let's leave it that way. Any time you want to come home, the invitation is there."

## Chapter XV

THEO listened at the head of the stairs to her father's stumping down them. She heard him puffing and swearing till at last he closed the front door. Then she ran to the window where she could just get a glimpse of the top of the car that bore him away. Not till it had disappeared did she turn on George with something like indignation.

"George dear, what on earth made you say that? I don't want them to think that there's any possibility of my—"

"I said it partly because it made it easier for him. Didn't you see? He was going to take a last good-by, as if he thought of you as dead. Now he doesn't have to. As long as he hopes that there's a chance of your going back to them—"

"But doesn't it seem to you cruel to let him suppose that?"

"I don't know that it does. In the first place, we sometimes have to kid people with a hope, even if it never comes to pass; and in the second, I see no sense in shutting a door which might as well stand open."

They sat half facing each other on the window seat. "Yes, but what would it stand open *for*?"

"How can I tell—yet?"

"Oh, then you think—?"

"No, darling, I don't think. I'd rather things happened without—without seeing them beforehand."

She tried to get his meaning. "When you say that

you'd rather things happened—have you any special thing in mind?"

"How can I have? Unless it is that—that everything is a special thing. Where there are so many—"

She smiled wistfully. "Poor George! You were so care free before I married you, weren't you?"

His own smile had the sweetness she adored. "Being care free isn't the best thing that can happen to a man. When he gives it up for love like ours, he knows it's cheap at the price."

"Thank you, George darling; but the hard thing is to go on and on accepting a great sacrifice—"

If there was a trap here, his very ardor caused him to fall into it. "You've said it. The whole thing's there in a nutshell. Only the sacrifice is yours."

"In as far as it is, if I can make it—"

"Yes, but it's seeing you make it!"

"You mustn't think that that means much, when I'm doing it for you. It's you I'm thinking of, George. But I can see well enough that before we were married you had a cheery, free-and-easy life with your little crowd of friends, with money enough for whatever you wanted to do, and I've come in and stopped it. I've cut you off from them—"

"Oh no, you haven't! We're all just the same as ever—at heart."

She sighed with a half smile. "Well, we'll say no more about it. It's rather hopeless. What's more to the point is that I'm running you behind in your budget. How much did you say we spent last month over what we had allowed for?"

"About sixty dollars."

"And there was forty the month before, wasn't there? That makes a hundred."

"Yes, but we can cut down on—"

"Oh, but there's so little to cut down on! With only twenty dollars a week for the housekeeping account . . . " She veered suddenly to another aspect of her theme. "Do you know what I've been thinking of? Now that I've got the work so well in hand—and there's really not so much to do, just for two of us—I think I might take a job."

The idea was not so startling as it would have been if most of the women he knew didn't do something of the sort "on the side," as they expressed it. Lemuella Burrage still treated the hair of a select group of lady clients, while Elma turned a nice little penny by trimming hats for her friends. But Theo was a princess in exile. At the thought of her taking a job his sense of incongruity was the same as he had felt on occasionally reading that an archduchess had had to go to work as governess.

He was content, however, to ask, in his soft drawl, "But, darling, what could you do?"

Without answering this question, she glanced at her wrist watch. "I'm afraid it's time to get the dinner."

When she had passed within the kitchen he continued to sit staring down into the street, whence the children were trooping to their suppers, but in which newspapers blew about like fallen angels' wings. He began going over the details of Blent's visit. They humiliated him, and yet in a sense they brought him comfort. If the worse were to come to the worst, here was a possible escape—for Theo. For himself it wouldn't matter. If he only didn't have to watch her burning out her heart in the effort to lead his narrow life, it seemed to him he would get the most



blessed of all changes. It was like praying for the release from incurable suffering of some one whose departure will leave the world a desert.

Wearing an apron to protect the smart frock which Sheila had brought her in the previous autumn, Theo tripped in from the kitchen. In one hand she bore a tin of soup, in the other a can-opener.

"George dear, you're so much cleverer at this than I am!" But she caught the glance which read the label on the tin before he thrust in the blade. "Yes, it's vegetable soup. I'm sorry. But I can make it with water, and so save a half pint of milk. Since we've got to be so careful—"

He handed back the opened tin. "That's all right, dear. I didn't say anything."

She threw back, fretfully, "I'd rather you did than have you put on that look."

"But I didn't put on a look. I'd as soon have vegetable soup as not. You must know I'm as anxious to save a half pint of milk as you are."

The subject of food was one on which she could not be reasoned with. Convinced that he was a gourmet and an epicure, and sensitive as to her own inefficiencies, she placed him always in an attitude of complaint. If he made a suggestion she threw up her hands and begged him to do the housekeeping himself. If he ate meekly, saying nothing at all, she saw him as a martyr. It was part of her objection to making economies—and God knew what economies could be made on an allowance of twenty a week for everything!—that anything but the best made him grumpy.

She was sure he was grumpy now and that he would consider in his heart the meal she was preparing to be insufficient. To her it was beggarly, ridicu-

lous, but it was the best that she could do. It was, above all, the best that she could do in the way of expert handling. The kitchen frightened her. The gas stove frightened her. The refrigerator frightened her. She was awkward with them and self-conscious, like a stableboy when he is afraid of horses. Elma picked up a frying pan as she herself would a pair of gloves. Lemuella took potatoes from the pot as if she was gathering flowers. But all her own approaches were timid and apologetic.

Having poured the soup from the tin and added the necessary water, she set the saucepan on the stove. In the oven she put two good-sized potatoes to bake. Because she was afraid of the broiler, the frying pan came next. Into it she dropped a lump of butter sparingly cut, before putting it to heat above the flame. From the refrigerator she took out the steak still wrapped in waxed paper, just as left by the meatman. She hated the smell of raw meat. She hated to touch the flabby red dead thing. Lemuella had shown her how to tip it into the frying pan straight out of the waxed paper, but she had never succeeded in this deftness. "Just take it in your fingers, dearie," Elma had counseled her. "I always do. Lemuella's that finicky she makes me tired." So Theo mastered her repulsions to take it in her fingers, dropping it into the hot frying pan. The immediate sound of frizzling gave her the sickening feeling that the steak was not now a dead thing, but a living one in agony.

From a drawer of the dresser she took the tablecloth. It was really a teacloth, with filet-work in the center and at each of the four corners. Her initials were richly embroidered at one end. From the store her mother had put by for her marriage to some prince

Sheila had filched a few sheets, a few pillow-cases, a few towels, and a little table linen, when they had first moved to Butter Street. They were all that Theo now had to recall the conditions she was used to.

The cutlery and spoons were like those of Elma Maggs, except that in their own case not even the teaspoons were in silver. When it came to buying them they were so near the end of George's savings that the cheapest had to "do." The plates, cups, and glasses "did" in the same way. In the purchase of such things as these Lemuella had introduced her to the five-and-ten-cent stores.

Having set the table, she hurried back to the stove to turn the steak with a big kitchen fork. While the sizzling began again she took from the refrigerator the salad prepared earlier in the day, and three cup-custards, two for George and one for herself, also baked that morning. To "save her steps," as Elma had instructed her, these were placed on the table.

She turned the steak again. The kitchen was filled with the odor of frying and a little meaty smitch. When she had ladled out the soup she threw wider open the window against which the table was placed.

"Come, George."

She had adopted the formula used by Elma, Lemuella, and every other woman living like herself. Merely to call out was a saving of her steps. George came. Squeezing his big frame into his settle, he tackled his soup with no more ado, as she tackled hers. It was always at this minute that the fact of having "fallen" came to her most painfully. The art of dining was lost in the grim necessity for eating. Since they needed food they fed, and that was all

about it. They fed without speaking, like two animals.

For the next course George removed the soup plates while she transferred the steak from the frying pan to a platter and took the baked potatoes from the oven. When they were settled again their interest turned on whether or not the steak was a little underdone. Taking a snip of it here and there, George decided that it was done sufficiently, and the meal proceeded. Each refused butter for the baked potato, though Theo had provided it. In view of the necessity for skimping, it was an obvious opportunity.

While George removed the plates the second time, Theo made the tea. They drank tea at their evening meal rather than coffee, which Theo made badly. Besides, it was more comforting. It didn't make her braver for the solving of her problems, but it consoled her for having them to solve.

Over the teacups she tried to answer the question he had asked her earlier. Suppers being served in all the neighboring houses, the street below was relatively quiet, while a rose-colored flush above the roofs across the way told them that somewhere there was a sunset.

"You wanted to know what I could work at. Well, I've thought that over. There are a number of things I think I might be able to do."

"Tell me some of them."

"For one thing, I used to be pretty good at drawing when I was at school. I'm pretty good at it yet. I might give drawing lessons."

Though he didn't want to be discouraging, he felt it necessary to be frank. "Darling, I don't believe that all the pupils you'd get would pay your car fares in going to see them."

"And I speak French—not so badly. I could teach French."

"Yes, but when you think of all the French people teaching it in New York, and speaking it well, and still not able to make a living—"

"Or I could go into a shop. I knew a girl whose father lost his money, and she was taken on to sell dresses."

"You might be taken on, too, if you knew anything about salesmanship."

"Or I might get a place as somebody's social secretary. There are lots of rich women—"

"The trouble is that nobody wants a secretary nowadays who isn't trained to the work."

"Oh, but why be such a wet blanket? There must be things I could do. I'll look at the paper." Springing up, she went back to the sitting room, where, as he sat smoking, he could hear the rattling of the pages as she searched. "Here, now; listen to this," she cried, returning to the kitchen. "'Young woman wanted. A well-known shoe-manufacturing company has an opening that will lead to an executive position. If you are quick and accurate at figures—'"

"And are you?"

"I'm quick. I'm not so very accurate, but I suppose I'm accurate enough. But here's another, with nothing about figures at all. 'Young woman wanted to learn the lunch-room business. Reply, stating age and previous experience.'"

"But you haven't had any experience."

With some such argument he met all her proposals, because he didn't believe her capable of doing remunerative work. She was too unlike the women who did it, of whom he knew so many. It was not that her



essence was finer; it was only different. He couldn't explain. He simply knew that there were women who could earn their own living and women who could not, and that he could discern between them at a glance.

He tried to make her understand this as he stood drying the dishes she washed. Because the task was crude and elemental, requiring no finesse, it didn't make her nervous, as the cooking did. The soapy, greasy water spoiled the beauty of her hands, but these she had long ago given up. Then, too, it was the only part of the housework which George shared with her. Standing over the dishpan, they laughed like two children or discussed things cozily.

"You see, dear," he said now, "if you were to answer any of these ads you'd find yourself one among two or three hundred applicants, and everything about you would keep them from giving you the job."

"Do you mean that I look like an idiot?"

"No, but you look like what you are, a girl who's never worked for a living. They're always suspicious of that kind, when there's real work to be done, and they'd size you up in the once-over."

"But women do work for a living, and they make a go of it."

"Yes, when they've looked ahead to it all their lives. Then they get the air of being able to do something, whether they can do it or not. But you! You've no idea how long it would be before you'd find anyone to take you—of how little they'd pay you—or of how hard you'd have to drudge. It's stamped all over you that you've been worked for, but that you haven't fended for yourself."

Nevertheless, Theo nursed her ideas, sure that she

could justify herself. Though in the course of the winter much of her old self-confidence had oozed away, there was plenty of it still to flush the veins of her will. Food must be bought; debts must be paid. If George couldn't do it, it was, as she phrased it, up to her.

That George couldn't do it was still a matter of distress to her. The "big thing" must be so easy. She was always reading in the papers of men who had achieved it apparently without taking any trouble. George would take any trouble in the world; but some hidden force worked against him. It might be a weakness of his own; her mind was not free from the suspicion; but if it was a weakness, why, then, she must love him the more.

But her father's visit had disturbed her. It had been wonderful to see him, to feel the affection of his kiss, and even to listen to his oaths; and yet the after-thoughts rendered her uneasy. They rendered her uneasy about George. He had insisted on leaving a door open which she was eager to see shut. It offered a way out, and that was what she didn't want. To George, on the other hand, a way out—that is, a possible way out—a possible way out which would probably never be made use of—appeared as a resource it would be folly to cut off.

She was thrown back on the question as to which she tortured herself whenever she didn't understand him. Was he sorry for having married her? Viewed coldly, it could be no more than natural if he was. It could easily be argued that she had tricked him into marrying her with a promise no more than a mirage. Did he never resent this? Did he never say to himself that he had been cheated? Was it possible

that in spite of all his surface sweetness he was secretly wishing he could get rid of her? She had broken up a life with which he had been well content. She had marred old friendships that were dear to him.

Notwithstanding her kitchen acquaintance with Elma Maggs and Lemuella Burrage, she had never struck a thought from them which had not to do with the gas stove. Having worn all such topics out, they saw less of one another now than in the days of her more helpless inexperience. Elma and Lemuella themselves drew away, in proportion as they found their instruction superfluous. "She's all right, Theo is," Elma declared, in explanation of this retreat. "She's only another breed of cats."

It was characteristic of Theo that she never asked herself if she was sorry for having married George. That was among the things too late to reconsider. It was more than a question of her love for him; it was one of the seals which marriage had stamped upon herself. She was George Pevensey's wife. Temperament, status, tastes, had all been transmuted by the fact. No matter what the restrictions and privations, she never asked how she could reconsider any more than she asked how she could cut her heart out.

## Chapter XVI

BUT if the way out was never to be used she must help to abolish any need for it. For that they must have more money. It was a matter of money and of nothing else. Wild as the project seemed, she meant to go out among the workers of New York and see what she was worth.

In this she lost no time. On the day following her father's visit she went to see Claudine. With Claudine herself her acquaintance was slight, but as a customer she was well known to the establishment. Ever since she was Sheila's age she had bought most of her best dresses there, and with Mademoiselle Jeanne her relations had been so friendly that the saleswoman often called her on the telephone when she had things which specially suited her. Probably she had called her through the winter, unaware of the change in her fortunes.

She chose the morning as the time of day when clients would be few and matters of pure business more in order. Claudine's establishment was in West Fifty-seventh Street, one of those stuffy, grandiose residences for which the eighteen-seventies had a genius, turned now by a magic wand into a light and airy temple, mostly in the style of Louis Seize. Having passed through the vestibule with its long glass doors, she came into a *salon* of neutral gold, backed by the soft golden brown of French walnut. Two rows of gilded Louis Seize chairs were arranged as if

for a concert, while behind them stood some half dozen armchairs. The effect was that of a state apartment in a palace, used only for gala occasions.

The hour being so early, the place, as Theo had hoped, was empty. But from a little room like an office opening out of the big *salon*, she heard herself greeted by Mademoiselle Jeanne.

"Why, Miss Blent! What a stranger! Have you been abroad? I called you up a lot of times through the winter, but was always told you were away." While making these cries in a high, sugary, affected voice, Mademoiselle Jeanne left her work in the office to hurry to Theo, who stood like a mendicant. "And imagine," she cooed, drawing nearer. "I had you on my mind only this morning. We've the sweetest little thought in changeable silk, a perfect little house dress. I saw you in it the minute it came into the showroom."

A tall, slight, graceful woman, she still looked young at a distance. Strictly speaking, she was not Mademoiselle Jeanne at all, but Mrs. Jenny Foley, with a husband and a family. But in things modish as in things musical an exotic name is in America a guaranty of excellence, and Mrs. Foley was a mistress of what the modern handbooks call the psychology of salesmanship. Before Theo could say anything her honeyed voice ran on.

"Do sit down, Miss Blent. There are two or three things I want you to see. Rhodora," she called to a tired, sick-looking girl, who had approached timidly, "bring the Salamanca." Rhodora dragged herself away on the errand. "That's not the changeable silk I spoke of. It's a Spanish thought. Toreador effect; awfully fetching on you."



Theo dropped into one of the gilded chairs because her trembling legs refused to support her. "I didn't come to get anything, Mademoiselle Jeanne. I came to see Madame Claudine on business."

"Imagine!" The sweet bright light went out of the saleswoman's face, leaving it lined and hard. "Madame's not in just yet. But if it's an over-charge, or a mistake about a bill, the person to see is Mr. Fletcher. If you'll tell me what it is I'll take it up with him myself. Oh, here's madame now."

Theo rose to confront a majestic woman, suggestive of Catherine the Great when the tigress elements were sleepy. Portly, but not tall, she was "gowned" as she herself would have said, with the quiet smartness which gave her house its reputation. The hues were of soft browns; in a brown hat of turban shape a single pink rose made for contrast. As she stood with her walking stick held Watteau fashion at arm's length, she might have been Catherine out to review her troops.

Mademoiselle Jeanne made the explanations, doing it in a tone from which the dulcet notes were dropped, since there was no prospect of a sale.

"Miss Blent would like to see you, madame, on business. She doesn't need anything this morning."

Behind the august figure, like a maid of honor, Theo found herself marching into the little office. There was no haste on madame's part, and no unwillingness. Being the type of executive to whom no detail is unimportant, she weighed little things as she did big ones. An executive was what she was. In the house of Claudine & Co. she directed everything and everyone—designers, cutters, fitters, needlewomen, saleswomen, bookkeepers, messengers, typists,

treasurers; she presided at meetings of boards; she directed policies; she took the credit of a *chic* due to her subordinates; but she used no blandishments on clients and rarely met them in the flesh.

A handsome woman, of slumberous, voluptuous features, she eyed the world as a half-asleep pantheress does it from its cage. Born in Hoboken as Julia Moriarty, she was now known in private as Mrs. Percy Fitts. But her friends heard nothing of Mr. Percy Fitts, nor was anyone so daring as to ask. They merely surmised that somewhere in her middle twenties Miss Moriarty had been the heroine of an episode of which the results to-day were her strong financial position and a daughter of fifteen now in a convent in Switzerland.

Entering the office, she glanced at the addresses on a pile of letters while she spoke to Theo in a low, slow voice not unsuggestive of a gurgle. "Sit down, Miss Blent. Or I believe you're not Miss Blent any longer. Didn't I read somewhere, or didn't some one tell me—?"

"That I was married. Yes, I have been." There was nothing for it now but the full confession. "That's it. I married a man named George Pevensey. We're not very well off. The reason I came to-day was to see if you could give me anything to do."

"Sit down," madame ordered again, in her sleepy, commanding tone. "Anything to do—what like?"

There was that in madame's cold regard which made Theo lift her eyes to the art reproductions of Nattier's daughters of Louis Quinze—Adelaide, Sophie, and Victoire—with plenty of bare bosom and bare leg, as she tried to express her ambition. "I thought I could sell dresses."

"Oh no, you couldn't! You wouldn't know how. If you came here at all it would have to be in some very humble position."

She explained further. The engagement of "help" was as a rule in the hands of Madame Elise. She, however, was away, and as Theo had been a customer of good standing Madame Claudine didn't mind going into the matter herself. But Theo must understand that you couldn't break into a big establishment like this without preliminary training any more than you could break into grand opera. Every one of the saleswomen had had years of experience and knew how clients should be handled. Moreover, the season was the spring, when the busy time was over. They were turning away help rather than taking it on. There was just one place which madame thought she might offer. The girl, Rhodora, was ill—she was a married woman and was going to have a baby—and would have to leave soon in any case. Her work was to know where the costumes were kept and to bring them into the *salon* for inspection. When a client came, and Mademoiselle Jeanne, for instance, was engaged with her, Theo would approach tactfully and be within easy call. When told what model to bring she must know where to find it instantly. Having brought that, she would doubtless be sent for another, and then for a third and a fourth. She mustn't delay; she mustn't muss the costumes up; she mustn't bring the wrong model. If she cared to take the job, Rhodora would explain its details and she could begin at once.

"To-day?"

"To-day, if you're in a hurry."

"I'm in a hurry because I want to earn some money."

Madame's sleepy eyes studied her through half-closed lids. "Oh, as to that you wouldn't be worth anything to us for a long time yet. What you'd earn would be in your experience."

Theo was amazed. "But shouldn't I get any money at all?"

Claudine considered. "Well, as you've left a good deal of cash in the house at one time or another, I suppose we could make a concession. Rhodora, I fancy, gets fifteen a week. I'd start you with ten. How does that strike you?"

Though it didn't strike her as generous, she was so elated at getting a job on her first application that she was ready to fall in with anything. All she had hoped for was to ease the home situation, and ten dollars would at least do that. In less than a quarter of an hour she was following Rhodora from room to room, from floor to floor, learning the names and locations of costumes and wraps in bewildering variety.

When a bell summoned Rhodora because a customer had appeared, Theo followed her guide to the outskirts of the *salon* and watched the unobtrusive way in which she edged near enough to Mademoiselle Jeanne to be easily addressed, while still keeping to the background. The saleswoman having turned to say, "The Mogador, please!" she sped with Rhodora to the floor above, where on a long hanging-stand the Mogador was seven in a line of twenty. Rhodora went to it unerringly, carrying it so that nothing touched or ruffled it.

"Mrs. Bird would like to see the Galatea," Made-

moiselle Jeanne said, sweetly, as the Mogador was delivered up. "That's the one I phoned you about," she went on to Mrs. Bird. "I saw you in it the minute they brought it into the showroom. Imagine! 'For a summer thought,' I said, 'it's Mrs. Bird and no one else.' But when anyone has a distinctive style like yours . . ."

This, so Theo thought, was salesmanship. All through these years she had been under the illusion that Mademoiselle Jeanne had a personal friendliness toward herself, whereas the interest went no further than the disposal of the wares. But she had no time to be cynical, since she was trying to remember the whereabouts of Galatea. Rhodora had pronounced the name, but in what room and on what floor? It came to her then that her work was largely to turn on her memory.

It was also largely to turn on her ability to keep on her feet. The running was incessant. When there were no customers whose whims were to be met, she was busy memorizing the names and positions of the models. Two other girls were doing the same work as Rhodora and herself, but chiefly for the fitting rooms. Whatever was for the *salon* was Rhodora's job, with Theo in her wake.

Rhodora's comments came at intervals, according as they got time. "Listen! You've struck the toughest job and the poorest paid in the zoo. Keeps head, hands, and feet at work all at the same time. Funny, ain't it? Harder the grind, slimmer the pay envelope. . . . Listen here! I'm married, but I don't like him much. Swede fellow. All pie for the foist little spell, and now he's sore because we're goin' to have a kid. Some piker, I'll tell the world. . . .



Listen! That Swede fellow's goin' to do me doyt. Just watchin' for his chanst. Some sunny day I'll find he's lighted out. Well, listen! He can, for all me. I'm through. . . . Listen here! Ain't old Jinny the queen with two faces? I'll say she is. 'Im-a-gine! I seen you in it the minute it come into the showroom.' My Gawd! And me runnin' hell-for-leather for every little thing she wants to palm off on them poor dumbbells sittin' in the gold chairs. Well, listen! I'm ready to quit the show the minute I get you broke in. . . . But listen! You've hit the wrong trail if you want to make a little dough. . . ."

By the afternoon Theo was carrying the models to Mademoiselle Jeanne, while Rhodora helped her in finding them. As visitors were now more numerous, the errands followed on one another breathlessly. In her eagerness to please she put into her mission more nervous energy than she need have done, so that by closing time she was exhausted. All the same, she was happy in the thought that her earnings for the day were a dollar sixty-six.

Going home at the hour when the subways were crowded, she was pushed, jostled, squeezed, man-handled, everything but struck. An American working-woman now, she could not complain of an American working-woman's treatment. She was only more worn out on arriving at the flat in Butter Street, where, to her surprise, George had not preceded her.

Since he was late, she had a little more leisure in going to work to get supper. This she did wearily. No steps having been saved her through the day, she could have tumbled into bed without eating. Only the thought of telling George her news kept her up and active.

But when he came in he was less excited than she had expected. He listened to her story with a dim, sweet smile, but a smile that had no zest in it. For almost the first time in their life together, he let her see that something had gone wrong with him.

This, however, he denied. When she questioned him as to whether anyone had "said anything" at the bank, he answered, No. He had not caught so much as a glimpse of her father; he had seen Spen only at a distance. The bank was all right. There was nothing there to worry her. She was so tired that she let the subject drop.

But he kept going over it, trying to analyze the difference between himself and Henry Pomeroy Davison. For it was in emulation of Henry Pomeroy Davison that he had spent the afternoon. It seemed to him at last that he saw an opportunity. If it was not the big chance Theo harped upon, at least it might be the next step upward on the ladder. Moreover, it would take him out of the great institution in which he was swallowed up, and put him into the small one where he would be more of an individual. From the gossip of his colleagues he had heard that a new bank with a small capital and small staff was to be opened at Pemberton Heights, a hill town on the New Jersey side of the river, not yet engulfed by the onpush of Hoboken. Their own cashier was a friend of the cashier of the new venture. From all he could learn, the subordinate officials had not yet been appointed. Mr. Scott, their own cashier, having furnished him with a note to Mr. Gully, the Pemberton Heights cashier, he had made his way to that suburb immediately after the Hudson River Trust had closed.

He was lucky in finding his man. The new bank

was a former dry-goods store being transformed by carpenters, plumbers, and electricians into a palace of finance. At so late an hour in the afternoon the workmen had left, but Mr. Gully and one or two more of the projectors were hanging about among unfinished desks and pens, with the air of proprietors who cannot tear themselves away. Finding the main door open, George walked in.

Mr. Gully, a ruddy, smiling man of not over forty, whose hair had gone prematurely white, received him pleasantly, and pleasantly turned him down. Sitting on the rail which was to divide the public office from the private one, he twisted between his fingers the line from Mr. Scott, and spoke as one who had made this refusal a good many times already.

"Barking up the wrong tree, my friend. When we name a paying teller it'll be a local man. Wouldn't be fair to home talent, to bring a fellow over from Manhattan."

In spite of feeling the justice of this, George followed the lead of Henry Pomeroy Davison so far as to say: "I'm the man you want. I know I could help you."

"That may be true, but we've got to do without you."

Mr. Gully having said this with a smile, his friends, who stood within the private office, also smiled, and George on his side smiled himself away. Not having expected the post, he was not really disappointed, but he wondered what made the difference between his model and himself. He was sure that after he had gone they had grinned over him and described him as a nut. Not so would they have described Henry Pomeroy Davison. He would have

impressed them with his energy even if he got the same answer as himself. What was it that he, George Pevensey, didn't have? If he could discover that he might supply it. He was as trustworthy as Davison could ever have been, and as willing to work. He would serve any honest man or any honest cause with a devotion not to be run across every day. Why then did no one see it?

In the question which millions have had to ask themselves, What lack I yet? he was so absorbed as not to do justice to Theo's energy and victory. When she crawled into bed, spent in courage as in body, she cried to herself from disappointment at his want of interest before she fell asleep.

## *Chapter XVII*

GOING back to Pemberton Heights on the next afternoon, George had the luck to find Mr. Gully again. Except that he had but one companion—a spare, elderly man with a sympathetic face, whom George remembered to have seen there on the previous day—the situation was similar to that of his first visit. Mr. Gully laughed aloud at his approach.

“Well, you’re a queer guy! What makes you think we want you, when I told you yesterday that we didn’t?”

George did his best to play up to the Davison standard. “Because I could swing the job for you better than anyone else.”

“Wouldn’t that be for us to judge?”

“Not if you judged that I couldn’t.”

Though Mr. Gully laughed again, and the elderly man with the sympathetic face smiled gravely, the answer was the same as on the previous day. They must have a local man. Though they had as yet no local man in view—George drew the admission—that was to be the new bank’s policy. Pevensey must take this decision as final. None the less, they appreciated his interest and would be willing to file his address on the chance of a change in the future.

He followed so closely the experience of Henry Pomeroy Davison that on his third visit, the next day, he found the new bank closed and deserted. This being precisely what had happened to his great ex-



ample, he decided that, like him, he would hunt down his quarry in his own home. The telephone directory having but one mention of the name Gully, at 23 Woodmere Avenue, he knew he was on the right track.

But he hated taking it. He hated this pushing of himself. Nothing but the sight of Theo's exhaustion when she came home from work would have driven him to doing it. Her enthusiasm over earning even a little money was so keen that he could only envelop her in his sweet, dim smile, but shame gnawed at his heart. What sort of a man was he that he couldn't save his wife from this? Would he never burst his iron-bound limitations? Was he so caught in his bookkeeper's pen that there was no escape from it?

Woodmere Avenue was a pretty street of quaint little wooden houses, each surrounded by its grass-plot dotted with shrubs in flower. Theo could be happy here—happier, at least, than in Butter Street—if he could only make his position a little better than it was, with a small increase in salary. It was so slight a boom that its very feasibility incited him into going against his instincts, blowing his own trumpet, and forcing himself on people who had already told him twice that they didn't want him.

Behind a hedge of lilacs, No. 23 had oddities like those of every other house in the street, with the further charm of a clump of rhododendrons in bloom. A cement walk led to a veranda and the front door. Limping up the walk, George heard a loud guffaw.

"Well, you sure are a nut right off the tree!"

Mr. Gully, with the same elderly grave companion as yesterday, sat on the veranda, smoking. The day being hot, he had put himself at ease, cooling off in his shirt-sleeves, his waistcoat unbuttoned, and his

feet on the veranda rail. Relieved at the good nature of his reception, George paused at the foot of the steps, grinning, and bringing out his words with stuttering embarrassment.

"S-s-sorry to be a ne-nuisance, Mr. Gully, but you said something yesterday about a possible change of plan—"

"In the future," Mr. Gully laughed. "I didn't say to-day."

"Well to-day is the future as compared with yesterday. Be-besides"—he still copied Mr. Davison—"I'm the man you want."

"Then we're saddled with a man we don't want; but there's no help for it now. Mr. Gort and I just been talking it over. Fixed on a smart young fellow right here at the Heights—bright and honest as a penny fresh from the mint. Married fellow, too, with four kids. Never had a chance like this in his life. Great lift to him. That must weigh with you, don't it?—the four kids, I mean. Wouldn't want to cut in under him?"

The question was settled now beyond reopening. The four kids dipped the balance for the local candidate. George acknowledged that this was so.

"You've treated me white, gentlemen, in taking it so pleasantly when I've butted in. I want to thank you. You'll not find me troubling you again."

"Oh, that's all right," Mr. Gully cried, amiably. "Glad to see you any time. Give us a good laugh. Have something to puff on your way back to the station." He extended a package of cigarettes. "Smoke Plucky Fights?"

"No, he only puts 'em up."

As George declined the courtesy the grave elderly

man spoke for the first time in all the three days on which Pevensey had seen him. Unable to find more words, George threw him one of his shy, boyish smiles as, lifting his hat, he turned to limp down toward the gate.

Having arrived home, he found Theo no more tired than on other days since she had been with Claudine, but perhaps more excited. Two girls whom she had known in the years of her "going out" had come to select gowns. The girls had looked at her, and seen nothing but the costumes.

"It's what I should have done in their places," she confessed, across the table between the settles. "It's what I always did. I must have sat in those chairs a hundred times. I must have had hundreds and hundreds of dresses brought for me to see. Each one was carried by a poor little slavey, with passions and a history, like Rhodora's or mine, and I never saw her. It wasn't that I didn't look at her. I must have looked at her. Only I did it without seeing her. For me she wasn't there, just as I wasn't there for Aggie and Cecilia Brown. I've always thought of the crowds of workers of that kind as invisible, and now I'm invisible myself. Funny, isn't it?"

But a day came, in her second week at Claudine's, when she was recognized. The summons being given to attend Mademoiselle Jeanne, she found herself in front of Helen Allenby. Helen was saying:

"I've just come back from abroad, but I didn't get anything. The styles in Paris were simply grotesque. I knew I should do better if I came to you."

Mademoiselle Jeanne was triumphant. "This is the chance we've been waiting for. I've been thinking so much about you. I was sure you'd come back

with trunks and trunks full. Imagine! Only yesterday a thing came in—a thought in pale blue and lavender—and I said on the spot, ‘If only Miss Allenby was here!’ You see, your style is so distinctive. Now this pale blue and lavender, I haven’t shown it to a soul. No one but you could carry it off; but you’d be simply stunning in it, especially with one of those Winterhalter hats—we’ve one or two such pretty ones!—Dosia, run and fetch the Angela—I think that’s the name they’ve given it. . . .”

Theo ran to fetch the Angela, sure that no more than Aggie and Cecilia Brown had Helen seen a sister soul in the unimportant little messenger. But when she came back and handed the Angela to Mademoiselle Jeanne she saw Helen spring to her feet and cross the intervening space with her long free stride.

“Why, Theo! You darling! What on earth are you doing here?”

Before she knew what was happening she found herself enveloped by a pair of strong arms, receiving a hearty kiss on her forehead. The kindness was so sweet, and the memories of home so overwhelming, that Theo burst into tears. Mademoiselle Jeanne was obliged ever so politely to intervene.

“It’s so good of you, dear Miss Allenby, and I’m sure that Dosia—that’s what we call her here—is touched. But you see she has her work to do, and discipline must be maintained. You understand, don’t you? Dosia, just run and bathe your eyes, and when you come back bring a couple of those Winterhalter hats—we don’t keep hats, as a rule, you know—but for a very special customer . . .”

But when she had come back Helen Allenby was gone and the disappointed saleswoman was annoyed.



Vaguely Theo had grown aware that in her new capacity Mademoiselle Jeanne didn't like her. Ill at ease in ordering her about, she preferred a girl like Rhodora.

"I never approved of society girls taking the bread out of working-girls' mouths," she said, tartly now, "and it don't pay the business. You're out of place here, Mrs. Pevensey, if it's I that says so. If you've quarreled with your family, it oughtn't to be some poor girl that's better fitted for your job that has to take the consequence."

Not to embitter this powerful influence, Theo made no reply; but later that day she met with a grave disaster. Perhaps she was unnerved; perhaps the tears which kept welling to her eyes half blinded her. Some reason other than physical awkwardness there must have been to account for such a mischance.

It was again a question of the pale blue and lavender. "It's the queerest thing that you should come in to-day, Mrs. Murphy, because the minute that thought was brought into the showroom I saw you carrying it off. Why I didn't call you up I don't know. I'm often shy that way, not liking to thrust myself on people who know better what they want than I do. But when anyone has a style like yours—well, they do come to your mind, now don't they? Dosia dear"—she had been very sweet since her hard words of the morning—"do run and fetch the Angela. I want so much to have Mrs. Murphy see it, even if she doesn't like it."

The disaster occurred while Theo was running with the Angela. The short skirt being the style that year, an impression of length was given by a trailer no



wider than a ribbon which dragged along the ground. Unhappily, it dragged along the ground while Theo was hurrying to feast Mrs. Murphy's eyes upon it. A false step, a ripping sound, a cry from Theo, and the trailer hung half torn from the knot of ribbons that secured it just below the left shoulder.

But Mademoiselle Jeanne took the mishap coolly. "The thing's been badly handled by a careless girl," she explained to Mrs. Murphy, "but you get the thought don't you?"

After that Theo heard no more of it. But on the following Saturday, on receiving her pay envelope, there seemed to be a card within. It was a type-written card, containing no more than a line. "Madame Claudine will not further need the services of Mrs. Pevensey." Theo was "fired."

It was a curious sensation. She was "out of a job." In the months of her marriage to George she had become familiar with the expression. Elma and Lemuella were forever telling her of some girl friend who was out of a job, or of some girl friend's husband. Of course this happened in her former rank in life. There was always some young fellow there who couldn't or wouldn't keep a job and threatened to be a ne'er-do-well. But in that case it was never so serious as among her present friends. There were families to fall back upon; there were rich relations; there were acquaintances with "pull"; there was a wide margin between being out of a job and suffering from want.

But here there was no such margin. If you stepped out of a job you stepped into want in the very act. You borrowed money, or you went into

debt, or you sponged on friends, or you did without food and at times without a bed, till another job was found. It wouldn't come to that with her so long as George had his forty-five a week; but if anything were to happen to that. . . .

## *Chapter XVIII*

SPRING became summer, and summer became hot. Butter Street was stifling. Across the way a row of old dwellings was being torn down to make room for a big apartment house. All day the engines puffed and screamed; at night the air was laden with a choking dust. Except for the few torrid hours of darkness the children never seemed to leave the streets. They played on all doorsteps, and in front of teams and motor cars. If ever there was a puff of wind, it only raised the refuse and blew the litter of old papers up against the house fronts.

After her failure with Claudine, Theo had been in two other places, and was now out of a job for the third time. The first of the two had been secured through an agency to which Lemuella had directed her.

"You see," said Miss Gumme, the agent, "the trouble is that there's nothing you know how to do. That makes it hard. Now and again we have a call for work which anyone can do, but not very often. If you'd had any experience with hotel work, now, or any kind of office work—but all I can do is to take your address, so that if anything turns up I can let you know."

To Theo's surprise, work that anyone could do offered itself in the course of a fortnight. The job was to look after the linen and laundry in an orphanage for girls. They had always had a woman

who "lived in"; but the matron was resolved on the experiment of some one who "lived out." She liked Theo, and the salary was seventeen a week.

The work was hard and monotonous, but after the semi-publicity of Claudine's, Theo enjoyed the privacy. All day long she counted table linen, towels, pillow-cases, sheets. She counted them when they were sent to be washed; she counted them when they came back clean. She stored them in presses; she handed them out. There was hardly an hour in the day in which some white thing was not passing through her hands.

The difficulty was in the living out. After a month of the new experiment the matron decided against it. If Theo would only come and live in . . . but that was out of the question.

The next job she discovered for herself. Passing through a quiet Brooklyn street not far from her own home, she saw a card in a window. "Reliable woman wanted for office work." The office, as she quickly found out, was that of Doctor Walling. Doctor Walling sounded like some kindly man, elderly, perhaps, and fatherly. Within a minute she was up the steps.

But Doctor Walling was a woman, large, neat, cautious apparently, and with a strange square face. In explaining to Theo what her duties would be, both diction and manner were ladylike. The odd thing was that her mind seemed less on her explanations than on Theo herself.

"You've had no experience," she summed up, "but with me that's less important than discretion. You'd have to remember that you're in a doctor's office,

and respect professional secrecy. You know what that is, don't you?"

Theo having replied that she knew, the quiet voice flowed on. "I've a little clinic here in the house, and my patients sometimes stay a day or two. You'd have nothing to do with that. Your duties would be limited to the room where we're sitting. You'd answer the telephone, take the names and addresses of patients who call up, receive them when they come, and in all things report to me. You'd never take any responsibility upon yourself. I'm the only one who can do that. The salary would be fifteen a week."

But after three weeks Theo left of her own accord. She left because she was suspicious and a little frightened. The work was easy, the patients being few, and always women. But they seemed to her women who had secrets. They had secrets for which professional secrecy was a phrase with a special meaning. Now and then they came with an old gray-headed doctor, who called himself Doctor Good. With a manner at once paternal and sinister he scrutinized Theo as Doctor Walling had done the day of the first interview. She was afraid of him, afraid of the house, afraid of the clinic upstairs. Of the woman doctor she was so afraid that she didn't dare to "give notice." George was obliged to telephone that she wasn't coming any more.

Then a calamity overtook them the like of which Theo had never supposed to be possible to herself. The provision dealer refused to extend credit till the outstanding account was paid up. On the 1st of July they owed him fifty-three dollars, and could put down no more than thirty-five. The difference was not great, but an old man with a wide experience among



the nomad dwellers in tenements and flats was crochety with regard to cash.

To George and Theo the worst part of the blow was in the humiliation; and to him the humiliation was twofold. There was that of the happening itself, and there was that of not having been able to shield the wife he loved from such disgrace. God knew that he had tried! He had tried in Orange, in Stamford, in Bridgeport. But whatever opening he heard of, it was always closed before he could get to it. Where there were so many like himself, eager for the next step upward, the ladder had no room.

"Don't you wish you were back at Blentwood?"

Having long postponed this question, he decided that the time had come for asking it. It would make an opening. If he could persuade her to go home before she was worn out beyond restoration . . .

For a minute or two she seemed to be thinking this over. In the heat and leisure of the evening the talk between them was desultory, with long silences. He had drawn their one armchair to the window, and in it she sat wearily. Though they had turned on no lights, the street lamps showed him the pose of her delicate head against the dark fabric of the chair.

"What makes you ask me that?" she put to him at last.

"Because you'd be out of this."

Again she allowed a minute or two to go by. "What would be the good of my being out of this, so long as you were in it?"

"It would be the good, for one thing, that I don't mind it—for myself."

"What you don't mind for yourself you needn't mind for me."

"But I do mind. I can't help minding. If you were Elma or Lemuella it would be another thing. They're used to it. They know how to meet it."

"You mean that they wouldn't have got into debt."

"That's only part of it. But as a matter of fact they wouldn't. They'd know how to feed two of us on twenty dollars a week because they've probably never had any more to spend. With you it's different. It's—it's"—he stammered on the words—"it's too hard for you."

Once more she reflected, letting so much time go by that he thought her too tired to talk. "Do you mean that it's too hard for me, in the sense that I ought to—to give it up?"

"Do you think I ought to ask you to go on with it? When a man's such a miserable skunk—"

"George darling, what's the use of calling yourself a miserable skunk when, if you'd only do some big business thing like nearly everybody else, you could have your own self-respect?"

"But I've tried, Theo. You don't know how I've tried. I've followed all the rules and done what your friend Mr. Davison did—"

"Why have you never told me?"

"Because you were busy with your own attempts to make money, and I didn't want to spin a yarn of disappointment. But if you like I'll tell you now."

As he gave her an account of his efforts at Pember-ton Heights, in Orange, in Stamford, in Bridgeport, she listened without comment. But for the first time since she had known him she listened without much sympathy. Convinced as she was of his powers, his failures falsified her hopes. He need not have failed. He failed because of some lack of will in putting up

a fight. It was as a strong man that she had married him, not as a weak one. If he proved to be a weak one she would go on loving him, only with a difference.

Not that this was her real thought. It was only an arrow in her quiver in case the fate she dreaded most were to overtake her. More and more she was haunted by the fear that to be rid of her would be a relief to him. She loved him with the whole self; she had become one with him. To be put away by him now would be more than she could bear without retaliation. All the quick tempers which during the year of their marriage had been more or less subdued would fuse at this point to a maddening white heat. She would not be able to control herself. She was hardly able to control herself now, at the mere suspicion.

The suspicion deepened as, his recital finished, he went on. "Do you remember that when we went down to see your family in Blentwood your father said I was just so much business fodder fed to the machine? Well, I guess that's about what I am."

"If that's what you are, that's what I am, too."

"Only that while I can't be saved, you could be."

"Saved—how?"

He eluded this question by asking another. "What good does it do to throw two of us away, when one's bad enough?"

"Do you remember that when the *Titanic* was lost there was a woman who wouldn't leave the ship, but preferred to go down with her husband?"

"If we were going down and ending everything, I might accept the sacrifice. But as we only seem to be drifting from bad to worse—"

"You won't."

"I don't think that's the thing to say."

"But if it's the thing you're obliged to feel—"

"If *what's* the thing you're obliged to feel?"

"That it would be easier for you if some one took me off your hands."

Though she said this bitterly, it was so near the truth that he decided to let it pass. "It would be easier for me if I knew you had the comfort you're accustomed to and were not being knocked about. It's because you are—"

"That you want to get rid of me."

"Oh, don't say that."

"But you're saying it yourself. You don't have to put it into words. I understand you. Because, as you call it, I'm being knocked about, you want some one to do for me what you can't do yourself—and the natural person is my father." Getting up from the armchair, she sat half facing him on the window seat. "George, I put it to you straight. Would you rather I went back home—or stayed with you?"

"How can you ask me that—?"

"I couldn't if I weren't forced to it. But I've wondered for a long time. And now, just for my peace of mind, I think you ought to tell which of the two you'd prefer."

"And if I preferred that you should stay—what could I offer you?"

So he *was* thinking of it. He would let her go. If she went he would have her off his mind. She felt the restraints slipping from her. She might say anything to him now. Afraid of herself, she was also daring to the point of cruelty.

"You might offer me the spirit of a man."

Jumping up, he limped away from her. "That's easy to say. It sounds awfully smart and spunky. But it won't help me to give you what you ought to have and what I can't afford to pay for."

Because she saw she had hurt him she was incited to hurt him again. "You don't know what it will do till you get it."

He tried to be placating. "You see, darling, the fix I'm in is so impossible—"

She laughed. "That I must get you out of it. But my fix is quite a simple one. My father won't give me any money because I'm your wife; and you don't want me as your wife because my father won't give me any money."

"Theo!" She knew the thrust had gone deep. "It breaks my heart to hear you say that."

"And saying it breaks mine."

"But since I can only give you the kind of life I'd have given my wife if I'd married a girl in my own class—and that life is killing you—what would you have me do?"

"What's the good of my suggesting, when you'd refuse to show fight? Since you're willing to stay here—and watch me go—"

"How can I keep you—in the way you ought to be kept—when my work and pay tie me hand and foot? I'm caught in the big economic machine, just as your father said. I didn't believe it at first, but I see that I am. I'm—I'm"—he sputtered and stammered—"I'm helpless."

Sitting upright, white and tense, she saw him only as a dark figure in the darkness. A cast-off woman, nothing would stop her now. The more he suffered



from anything she said the more it would give her satisfaction.

"And you probably don't realize that there's nothing an American woman despises more than just that kind of helplessness."

She knew her shot had carried by his cry. "Oh, if you're going to despise me, too, like all the rest of them—"

Springing to her feet, she went and confronted him, two dim figures unable to see each other's faces. "What can I do but despise you when, without lifting a finger, you'd stand still and see me leave you? No woman in the world, who'd tried to do for you what I've tried, could bear that. I thought I was marrying a hero; but I've found he was only—a clerk."

"That's where you made your mistake. I wanted you to see it from the first—"

"Well, I've made my mistake, and now I must pay for it." She repeated in a lifeless voice, as if she was reciting, "Because I'm your wife my father won't give me any money; and because my father won't give me any money, you don't want me as your wife." Her tone became offhand and desperate. "All right, George, since I don't know how to work—and you can't keep me and must have me off your mind—I'll do what I thought I could never do. I'll go back home."

Passing him while he stood broken and speechless, she groped her way toward the bedroom. But on the threshold she paused and turned.

"But I shall have one comfort, George. My going will bring you a hundred thousand dollars—perhaps *two*. It's stupid of me not to have thought of that before. You should have reminded me."

He strode after her to the doorway. "Theo, you've said some hard things to me to-night and I've forgiven all of them. But this last one I shall never forgive, not as long as I live."

Her response came through the darkness. "Very well, George. The less forgiveness between us the easier it will be to arrange—to arrange the things that must be arranged—after I've left you."

But because her voice broke with a sob he hurried back to the front room in order not to hear it.

## *Chapter XIX*

WHEN Jackson Blent drove away, on that spring afternoon, from seeing his daughter in Butter Street, he was as near as possible to giving in. He would never forget the room in which she lived, the bedroom in which she slept, the table between the settles at which she ate. Leaning back in a corner of the limousine, he gulped out a few hard, tearless sobs such as had not convulsed him for well on to fifty years.

The difficulty was as to how he could save his face. He could not acknowledge a mistake; he could not depart from his attitude of being right. Whatever he did, he must still be Olympian Jove. Olympian Jove could not nullify his decrees or eat his own words. A means must be found by which Theo could be reinstated while he would appear as the wise, kind dictator which he knew he was.

In nearly a week's thinking the best he could devise was that some one should detect in Pevensey qualities of financial ability which had hitherto been overlooked. He might then send him to one of the company's foreign agencies, with a salary of perhaps ten thousand dollars, and some sort of oversight to keep him from blunders. They would thus be free from want, while Theo's position would be bearable.

But here he was met by the fact that in his conversations with his colleagues—with his old friend, Wally Stone, the vice-president, in particular—he had in-

sisted on painting Pevensey as a dolt. They would have been willing to give the Big Chief their support had he pitchforked his new son-in-law into a good position; but he had rejected the backing up. To creep back now and eat humble pie was so galling to his self-confidence that he sought a subterfuge. Not that he thought of it as subterfuge. Any way that would deliver Theo and yet secure his position as the family god would for him be a straight and open way.

It was on his wife and Sheila that he first tested his new inspiration. "They tell me at the bank that that fellow Pevensey isn't such a fool as he looks."

In the darkness of the terrace Sheila seized her father's arm. "Oh, but he doesn't look a fool. He's very handsome."

Mrs. Blent sat still in her wicker chair. "Is this something new?"

"It's new to me. I didn't suppose he had it in him."

"Had what in him?"

"Any kind of financial ability. I'd put him down as a fish."

Sheila exclaimed, triumphantly: "And now you see you were wrong! I've been telling you all this time that you were making a terrible mistake."

It was precisely what he had been afraid of. "I've made no mistake whatever. If the damn fool didn't develop earlier the fault was his own."

As he led the way into the house his wife and daughter followed him. In the living room his wife put the question:

"Well, what'll happen now?"

"How do I know what'll happen now? I suppose if he's fit for a better position he'll get it."

Suffering was stamped on her wide, formless face as if it had been carved in putty. "In that case would you let us—would you let us—go to Theo—?"

"That'll depend on her. If she can learn to climb down—"

Without finishing his sentence he lumbered across the room and out of it. Purposely he had sprung his ideas after having said good night, so as to avoid discussion. The discussion took place when he had disappeared. They lived so much on hints, on the merest straws of possibility, that they were quick to scent a change of wind.

"Something's up," Sheila declared, in a dry tone of relief. "He's had all he can stand. I didn't tell you before because I thought it might upset you, but he's been to see Theo for himself."

Mrs. Blent sank into a chair like a bubble descending to earth. "How do you know?"

"Hannah found it out, and told Primrose; Primrose told Aunt Katty, and Aunt Katty told me. That's all I know, except that Theo's living in a cheap apartment house in Brooklyn."

The poor plump face was comic in its tragedy. "If something doesn't happen I'll not be able to restrain myself. It's all I can do as it is not to put arsenic in his tea."

"Now, mother dear, what's the use of that? What you could do easily enough is to find out where Theo is and go and take her clothes and money. He's made me swear that I won't, and so I can't. But you're in a different position. You're her mother, and no law in the land need make you knuckle under to him the way you do—"

"That's all very fine; but you haven't lived through



the years of being afraid of him that I have. If I could only do something to him that would make him crumple up—”

But, the would-be murderess bursting into tears, Sheila's task became the nightly one of bringing consolation.

Upstairs, Blent was saying to Hannah: “Queer thing the way a lot of bloody fools'll try to make you think you didn't understand your own business. Yes, and your own family, too. Everyone ready to jump on you. ‘Terrible mistake you made!’ But, by God! I'll show them!”

“You'd show them, sir, if it was worth your while,” Hannah answered, tactfully. “But a man like what you are, 'e don't 'ave to give no explanations to no one.”

“Something in that,” Blent agreed, as Hannah took off his patent-leather shoes.

But if Blent had inspirations, Mrs. Blent had them too. One of them took her on the following forenoon to call at Allenby Manor. For this she had the excuse that Allenby and his daughter had arrived within a few days from Europe, so that the call might be considered as a friendly bit of welcome. She asked for Miss Allenby, but kept her eyes open for the master of the house.

As a house it differed from most of those which, within a generation, had sprung up throughout Old Tilbury, in that it was simpler and at the same time mellower and more dignified. The long plain brick front was Georgian with no modern self-consciousness in being so. The porte-cochère was merely a flat roof supported by four columns in front of the main entrance. Except that the faded red of the brick walls

was covered here by Virginia creeper, and there by amœloopsis, there was nothing else that merited description. Set in a finely timbered bit of ground that might almost have been called a park, the house suggested an English model, dating from those early Hanoverian days still reminiscent of Queen Anne.

Miss Allenby had gone in to New York, but as Mrs. Blent was turning away she found herself hailed, in exactly the way she had hoped for, by Allenby himself. Coming up from the gardens, he wore the knickerbockers and the Norfolk jacket in which he was so perfectly the country gentleman. With women like Mrs. Blent he had a special manner. It was the cozy, intimate manner of a kindly fellow with women who no longer get from any man much of the intimate and cozy. He understood them; he paid them the compliment of assuming that they understood him. There was nothing sentimental in his attitude. He was just a friend and neighbor, interested in the domestic joys, convulsions, and vicissitudes with which women are preoccupied.

His greeting was friendly, putting her at her ease without self-consciousness. Instead of asking her into the house he led her to the screened-in brick terrace looking out toward the gardens, where they were chaperoned by the two men working among the flower beds. She noticed that he always had these delicate circumspections whenever she happened to be alone with him. She liked it. It was a tribute to the fact that between him and her there might be something dangerous.

As he had taken his pipe from his mouth, to hold it respectfully in his hand, she begged him to go on smoking. Having spoken at first of the European

trip, it was easy to drift into talk of the winter as it had been spent at Old Tilbury.

"I hope I shall never have to go through another like it," she moaned. "I know no more of Theo than if she was in another world, and her my own daughter."

"Yes, but why do you stand it?"

"Oh, stand it! I've stood so much. I've got the habit of it. It would be easier for me to put arsenic in his tea than to do anything he told me not to. I'm only a weak woman. I should have married a defender and not a tyrant."

Venturing a timid upward glance at him, she was gratified to see his kind eyes bent on her in pity.

"So you should have; and yet he's not so bad. His intentions are all right, if he only had better judgment."

"And that's why I've come to you this morning. I believe he's having a change of heart. If you'd only speak to him."

"Speak to him—what about?"

"About Theo—straight."

"I've done it indirectly—before I went away. I don't know that I've the right—"

"You've got the right that he admires you more than he does any other man in the world. If he only knew that you considered the way he's acting toward Theo cruel and foolish . . ."

So it happened that on the first occasion of the neighbors tramping over their fields together and commenting on their crops, Allenby took occasion to ask, "By the way, what about Theo and that young chap she cleared out with?"

Blent stiffened. "Oh, nothing in particular. Still got his job at the bank. They live—somehow."

"Of course, old top, you know your own business best—"

"I do."

"And yet it seems to some of us—"

"Don't care a hoot how it seems to anyone but myself."

"I know you don't. But some of us think that you've played the heavy father long enough. Don't get offended if I say that it's an old-fashioned rôle—*démodé*—out of date nowadays. If I didn't care a whole lot about you I wouldn't run the risk—"

"I appreciate that, neighbor; and all I've got to say is that nobody knows where the shoe pinches but the wearer, as the saying goes. Very kind of my friends to think about my troubles; but there's one thing they don't remember, that I'm a chap who generally knows what he's about."

The tone being final, Allenby found himself blocked, nor had he any means of guessing the extent to which he had defeated his own ends. Stumping back toward home, Blent cursed inwardly. When he paused for breath, which a very little exercise compelled him to do frequently, he cursed more bitterly. What did they mean, hounding him like this? Couldn't the fools see for themselves that they were driving him the other way? Old-fashioned—out of date—*démodé*! What did that mean—*démodé*? French way, it sounded like, of telling him he'd become a back number. Well, he'd show them.

The result of Augusta's strategy in enlisting the services of Paget Allenby was only to postpone George's promotion. To Blent it was clear that if

he proposed sending Pevensey abroad with a handsome increase of salary his colleagues would say he was coming off his perch. They would put him down as repenting. Having started out in the grand manner, he would be seen as flopping into bathos. It wouldn't do. Some other scheme must be devised.

In devising that scheme the weeks passed by. Between love for his daughter and love for himself Blent was unable to strike a compromise. If fools wouldn't interfere with their advice he knew he could find this compromise easily enough; but in the meanwhile time was flying. So much had flown that Spen, on returning one day from the bank, was surprised to get a message from Helen Allenby. It had come by telephone, and merely said that as she was anxious to see him she hoped he would call at the manor.

Though since her return from Europe he had avoided rather than sought her, he called at once. She too was on the screened brick terrace, having a solitary tea.

"Oh, Spen, how good of you! I couldn't wait an instant longer. I've seen Theo. How much do you know about her, Spen?"

The attack was so abrupt that all he could do was meekly to sit down and stir the tea she passed to him. "I don't know anything. We've made it a point not to know."

"That seems to me a pity. If you were to see her—"

She told him of her visit to Claudine's. "I didn't notice her at first. One doesn't. Besides, I was occupied with that hypocritical old Jeanne. It was only when she brought the thing for me to see. . . . Oh, Spen, I can't tell you how I felt. It wasn't just that



she was doing the work. That's nothing. It was the way she looked."

From the deep red with which he first heard Theo's name he paled to sallow. "How did she look?"

"I can't describe it. She didn't look tired. It wasn't that. But she was like—it's the only way I can put it—she was like some one who's been moved on fifty years in the way of experience. The easiest thing to say of her face is that it was haunted. She seemed to have gone through things that other people don't go through. I couldn't bear it. I couldn't wait for her to come back. To have her running at the call of that fee-fawing Jeanne—and yet I felt like a traitor to come away and leave her there. Oh, Spen, can't you do anything?"

He tried to explain his father's policy. When sufficiently starved out, Theo would come back to them.

"I call that brutal," she exclaimed. "It's worse than brutal; it's *démodé*. It's the sort of thing people don't do nowadays. Why, I know dozens of families in which some one has gone off and got married like that, and the rest just made up their minds to it. If you know you've got the position, you don't really care."

The view was new to him. "Well, perhaps we haven't got the position."

"Oh, Spen, don't talk like that! It—it sickens me. One of the things that have kept me from—from liking you—the way I might—is that you seem to think there's so much in position, when there's nothing—nothing."

He said, bitterly, "That's all very fine, when you've got it to throw away."

"You've got it to throw away when you know you have. It's not so much a matter of what others think

of you as of what you think of yourself. If you think enough of yourself to drop position from your list of words, and the thought of it from your thoughts—”

“If I did would it make any difference—?”

Nervously she poured another cup of tea. “I don’t know what difference it would make. It would—it would make a lot. But we’re talking about Theo. So long as she’s married to the man, and there doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with him. . . .”

“So long as she’s married to the man,” Spen said to his father that night, “and there doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with him, what would you say to calling the whole business off?”

Blent looked at his son suspiciously. “What’s put that into your head?”

“Oh, I’ve been thinking about it for a long time past. It isn’t a thing that people do nowadays. You can call it brutal if you like; but I say it’s worse than brutal; it’s *démodé*.”

Blent’s suspicion now became a certainty. “Where did you get that word?”

“Oh, it’s just a word. I hear it around.”

“Means that you’re a back number, doesn’t it?”

“Something like that. Gone out of style. Way you’ve been treating Theo, dad, seems to me like what people did—well, say fifty years ago. It’s pass-ay. Why, I know dozens of families in which some one’s gone off and got married like that, and the rest just make up their minds to it. If you know you’ve got the position you don’t really care.”

“But suppose you haven’t got the position?”

“Oh, dad, I wish you wouldn’t take that line of talk. Kind of sickens me. It don’t go down with us

younger lot. You've got the position when you know you have. If you think enough of yourself to drop position from your list of words—"

"How long have you thought so much of yourself as all that?"

"Been—been growing to it. Seems to me now that you're not giving Theo a fair deal."

"You mean that I ought to call the dogs off."

"That's what I mean. She's your daughter. She's our sister. What do you think she's doing?"

Blent said he didn't know.

"Well, I know. She's got a job with a dressmaker named Claudine."

As clearly as he could remember it he explained to his father the nature of Theo's work, as Helen had described it. "And I say it don't do you any credit, dad, if you ask me."

"Well, have I asked you?"

"No, but I'm telling you. It don't give the community a good impression of the name of Blent. Why, they're laughing at us—"

The phrase was ill chosen. Blent brought down his fist on a table with a bang.

"Then, by God! they can laugh till they damn well split their sides! If you think it means anything to *me*—"

"What might mean something to you, dad, is that everybody in the bank—Stone, Priest, the lot of them—thinks you've gone into this thing without knowing where you're going to get off—"

"Oh, they do, do they? Then they'll see—and you'll see—*just* where I'm going to get off, and that's all we need say about it."

But it was when alone with Hannah that he fully

expressed himself. Here he could let himself go, because Hannah knew that he was always right. Alone of late this faithful servitor upheld the tradition of loyalty. Night after night, throughout that spring and all through the early summer, he let the tide of protest and profanity sweep over him, with hardly ever a response beyond the "Yes, sir," "No, sir," of unquestioning devotion. To Blent he offered an outlet, a victim on whom all his indignation could be spent. If they would only leave him alone! Didn't they suppose that his heart ached for Theo more than theirs ever could? Hannah was consoling, till there came a moment when his defection left his master without a friend.

It was the night on which George and Theo were baring their souls to each other that Hannah was impelled to bare his. The atmosphere being sultry and thunderous, Blent was sitting at a window in his underclothes. It was all he could do to breathe. An oppression of the chest seemed to stop his inhalation before the air reached his lungs. This made him curse the more, choking on his curses as if he would die of strangulation. For the first time in his long years of service Hannah was afraid.

Fixing into the stretcher the trousers Blent had just kicked off, he spoke because he could do nothing else. "Wouldn't it be 'ealthier for you, sir, if you was to cut out them bad words and just make up your mind as other people has a little sense as well as you?" Before the astonished employer could recover himself Hannah hurried on. "Seems to me as if you might bust a blood-vessel or give yourself a stroke, through 'avin' them awful tempers. Don't you never think, sir, how terr'ble it'd be to go into the presence o'

your Maker swearin' to beat the band, the wye the 'abit's grown on you?"

But Blent seized only on the point which to him was important. "What do you mean by other people having a little sense as well as me? Out with it."

Hannah retreated to a clothes closet, where he hung the stretcher on a transverse pole. "'Twouldn't be but nat'ral if they 'ad, now would it, sir? Everybody can't be wrong, and only one person right."

"Right—about what?"

"I know, sir, but it ain't for me to sye. I've watched it comin' on you ever since Miss Theo left. If you was to stop goin' agynst nyture, and be a lovin' father like what you used to be—"

With a mighty effort Blent mastered himself so as to speak quietly: "That'll do, Hannah. You can go now. I shan't want you any more to-night."

"Very good, sir. Thank you, sir."

"But I did think, Hannah, that whoever turned against me—you'd stick."

"Yes, sir; and so I will. But I wouldn't be your fythful servant, that's wyted on you 'and and foot for thirty years, if I didn't warn you agynst them hapoplexy fits, all through gettin' into one of your fearful waxes." His hand being on the knob, he had assured his escape. "If you was to do what we all wants you to do, and confess that you'd myde a mistyke about Miss Theo—"

The only offensive weapon to Blent's hand was a porcelain tobacco-jar. Before Hannah could finish his sentence the jar had been hurled, striking the door and breaking into fifty bits. Hannah picked them up.

"There you go, sir. It's what I'm complynin' of.



One of these dyes it'll be sudden death for you, and then you'll be blymin' me."

No more than Blent had ever seen it as one of Theo's traits to go straight and do the thing forbidden her did anybody ever see it as one of his. Pity for his daughter was lost in pity for himself. Everyone had now deserted him. He was alone. Very well, then, he would go it alone. If they thought that that was what he was afraid of, he would show them. Knowing how he would show them, he would give himself to the task not later than the next morning.

## *Chapter XX*

THEO was sleepless all that night, but she lay as still as she could so as not to disturb George. George, too, was sleepless, but he lay as still as he could so as not to disturb Theo. Each, thinking the other asleep, lay awake with hard thoughts.

From one damning fact Theo's mind could work neither backward nor forward. He would stand still and see her go. Incredible as it was, it was the truth. Unworthy as it was, it was not too unworthy for him. The indignities and humiliations she had borne in the year she had been his wife were to this but as the chastisement of whips as compared to the scourging with scorpions. It didn't merely lash her on the surface; it stung and burned and poisoned her to the bone. She would never get over it. She would not forgive him, even if he came in the morning to say he had repented.

But he had no intention of coming in the morning to say he had repented. If in her sight he was beyond forgiveness, so was she in his. Her misunderstanding of him had been willful. She had accused him of lacking the spirit of a man! He was ready to sell her for the sum which her father would pay for her return! These were charges not to be made twice. To have made them once was as fatal and final as the taking of a life.

Of the two, it was the first that embittered him most, because of its greater plausibility. Many a time

he had so accused himself; but to accuse himself was one thing, and to be accused by her was another. For it wasn't true. He did not lack the spirit of a man. Lying still in the darkness, he went over the lines of his defense. In the war he had made good. If in peace he couldn't do it, it was because of the elaboration of the system. No more than a private in an army or a prisoner in a penitentiary could he escape from the working of the great machine.

For the handful who did thus escape, the Davisons of the business world, there were millions and millions and millions who were business fodder to the end. They were caught, press-ganged, shanghaied, by the mere necessity for living. If he lacked the man spirit, then all the workers of America and Europe lacked it, too. In the war the men who had been cannon fodder were men as much as their commanding officers. It wasn't the degree of manliness which made some men food for the guns and put others at G. H. Q. It was a vast antecedent system, social, economic, and political, which few had the power to overcome. Theo had talked of his doing some "big thing" that would make him a personage in the financial world, as if all the forces of business were not organized to keep him adding figures.

They had need of some one to add figures. They had need of some one to add figures at forty-five a week. To pay more to one would mean paying more to all, and if they paid more to all they would have to decrease their dividends. The dividends paid by the Hudson River Trust had risen of late to an amazing percentage, and to keep the figure there was a matter of pride to the directors. Theo didn't see that his value could not be made more than he would bring

without to that degree throwing out of gear the economic methods of the country.

And so he could not support her as she needed to be supported. In living the life to which he condemned her, she seemed to be dying on her feet. What was he to do? Should he keep her and kill her? Or should he beg her to go back to her own way of life? Was it possible she didn't know what it cost him to do that? Of course she knew! She knew, and flouted him. As far as he was concerned it was the end.

It was he who first fell into a fitful sleep. When he woke with the earliest gleams of daylight she was asleep at last. He got up softly. If he waited she too would get up, and prepare his breakfast. The commonplace round would begin, and yet not begin, in a way he couldn't bear. He could not forgive her now, even if she woke to say she had repented. Softly he dressed. Softly he tiptoed away.

On getting up to find him gone, she was relieved. At least, she would not have to keep him in countenance, to go through the hateful business of the gas stove. To be alone with her unhappiness was something. She prayed that he would not come back till she had gone, herself. Since he wanted to be rid of her, he should be rid of her. Beyond that she had no thoughts.

GEORGE:

The end is not as sudden as it seems. I have felt it coming for a long time past. I might even add that I've watched it on the way. Perhaps there could have been no other. I don't know. I can't think about it any more. I loved you, George. I would gladly have stayed with you. Even if, as you were so fond of saying, it was killing me, there are some things worse than death. One of those

things I am doing now. But I shall not come back again. To be sent away once is enough. Don't come after me and don't blame yourself. We've made our experiment, and found it a failure. For both experiment and failure I take the responsibility. I can only hope that for you at least the experience will not be wholly thrown away and that another wife will do for you the things I have not been able to.

THEO.



## *Chapter XXI*

JACKSON BLENT was sitting in a revolving chair at a flat-topped desk which held the center of his private office at the bank. It was a business-like room, with none of the period furniture and faïences of which some bank presidents made a kind of coquetry. At the back a door led to an outer office, while to the left was another door leading to the public portion of the bank. Over a mantelpiece hung a lithographed portrait of Theodosius Spencer, the founder of what was now the Hudson River Trust, in the costume of the 'fifties. A few worn leather armchairs, a few of the better kind of office chairs, a couch in a corner suggesting use by a semi-invalid, a small hanging cabinet on a wall, made up the furnishings.

At the end of the desk sat a sleek, elderly man, purring and tactful, very much the henchman. Blent, who held in one hand a document several pages in length, and in the other a single page only, turned toward his secretary and spoke with a slight pant.

"This seems to be all right, Gentry, but I'll look it over more in detail. After lunch I'll get you to hand it to Miss Barry, to make a clean copy."

Gentry rose. "Very good, sir."

"And of course both you and Miss Barry understand"—he struggled for breath—"that—that this is absolutely private."

"Quite so, sir. I don't think you've ever found

your confidence misplaced in either Miss Barry or myself."

"Of course I haven't, and that's why I trust you now. That'll do for the present. I'll ring when I want you." Gentry was withdrawing when Blent spoke again. "Oh, and by the way, you might ask Mr. Priest and Mr. Stone if they'd come and speak to me."

"Mr. Priest isn't in the bank, sir; but I'll ask Mr. Stone."

Left alone, Blent hurried to the hanging cabinet for a spoonful of his restorative. He had scarcely regained his desk when the door on the left opened, letting in the clatter of many typewriters. In Wally Stone's heavy-jowled, clean-shaven business face you could read a rough, kindly character of the type which, having risen from the ranks, keeps the air of the ranks about him. Taking out of his mouth the big unlighted cigar which habit sent traveling from one corner of his lips to the other, he exclaimed, with a forced joviality:

"Hello, Jackson! What's to do?"

Blent glanced up at him, but returned to the single sheet he again held in his hands. "Sit down, Wally, will you? I'm putting a codicil to my will."

Sitting astraddle on a small chair, his arms folded on the back, Stone looked uneasy. "Not leaving us, Jacko, I hope."

"No, Wally, not yet awhile; but as you and Priest were willing to act as trustees under the will as it was, I thought I'd like to know if you'd care to take the responsibility—as it's going to be now."

"Will it kill us—the responsibility?"

"No, but it may make you sick. It's about Theo."

"Don't be too drastic, Jackson. Think it over good and plenty. You know how my wife and I felt when our girl, Emily, married that actor man. Wanted to disown her—all that bunk. But they get on pretty well together; and now that we've got the grandchildren, by golly! if we don't like it."

So it was true, as Spen had said, that Wally Stone also was against him. Not that it mattered now. Since he was going to show them, he would show Wally Stone with the rest. To the best of his ability he made his position clear.

"So that," he concluded, "Theo knows my terms. As long as she stays with the fellow, not a cent. The day she knows she's starved out and comes back home, in such a way that she can be free again, she comes in for everything she forfeited."

Stone got up and strode to the desk, where he stood looking down at his old friend. "Say, Jackson; I wish you wouldn't put this through."

"I've got to, Wally. If you're getting cold feet over acting as trustee—"

"No, I don't care a damn about that. Not thinking of myself, but of you. Seems to me you'd be a big sight happier—"

"It's not a question of my happiness. I've got to rescue Theo."

"Rescue—hell! Thought I had to rescue Emily. Was going to cut her off with a dollar. But when I settled an allowance of five thousand a year on her, by golly! if I didn't feel a weight roll off o' me."

"Yes, Wally; but you never expected of your girl the things I looked for from mine."

Wally's tone was nettled. "Oh, didn't I, then? Suppose you thought you'd the only high-steppin' filly

on the course. By golly! I sure believe that Emily'd bring down a lord. And when she brought home an actor—well, it was a wet day for me, I can tell you that."

"Yes, I know it was hard on you, Wally—"

"But what I want you to see is that I was hot to make it a long sight harder. I thought that if I turned her adrift—"

"I'm not turning Theo adrift. I'm winning her back home."

"Then let me tell you you're going the wrong way to work. Jacko, we're not talking now as the president and vice-president of the Hudson River Trust which we've become. I'm speaking to you as your old friend, grown up with you from the days when your father kept a livery stable and mine a little grocery store. Don't put that codikle to your will. In the first place, I don't believe it'd be legal, but that's not the part I'm thinkin' of. Treat the girl as you like, so long as you're alive and can change your mind any day you want to, but—"

Blent groaned aloud. "I tried to change my mind, but the fools wouldn't let me."

Unable to get the force of this, Wally finished his sentence. "But don't have a codikle that'll make her hate you when you're lyin' in your grave. The minute I climbed down off o' my high horse and said to my Emily—"

"Yes, Wally, but there are things that come natural to you which, if I was to do them, 'd kill me."

With one hand on the door knob, Stone turned to say: "I'll tell you what'll kill you, Jackson. It'll be the stubborn spirit that turns you into a steam-roller instead of a man with guts. The minute that pride

o' yours strikes something it can't batter down, it's always hell with you. Go ahead and sign your codikle if it gives you any satisfaction. It'll not hurt Priest nor me, because the law'll not allow us to put it into execution. But that won't make any difference to the way Theo's going to feel when she knows it's what you intended."

When the door had closed Blent hid his face in his hands. Wally Stone had the right of it. He himself would be a long sight happier if he could go to Theo and make it all up. Why couldn't he? What sort of devil was egging him on to things he didn't want to do? He couldn't tell. All he knew was that to eat humble pie was impossible. They would applaud him; they would crow over him; they would tell him in fifty ways that he had been a melodramatic idiot. It would be the end of his power as a little God Almighty. Even in his own household he should be dethroned. His wife, Spen, Sheila, Hannah would have won the right to laugh at him as lawgiver. As for Theo and her man . . .

It did not make it easier to reflect that if he wished to pitchfork Pevensey into a big position, now was his opportunity. Wally Stone would back him in anything. He would jump at the chance. All he, Jackson Blent, would have to stand would be a little slapping on the back, a little commendation as a well-meaning chap who had lost his senses for a bit, but had now come back to them. Could he do it? Perhaps—if he could show them first. If he could have his codicil copied, signed, witnessed, and put into the hands of his trustees, it would still be in his power to tear it up. To tear it up would then be an act of magnanimity—and he would have shown them!



He was reaching this decision when the opening of a door compelled him to look up. Gentry was approaching with a letter in his hand.

"I had to bring it in, sir," he said, apologetically. "The—the young lady insisted."

Tearing open the envelope, Blent read the few lines hurriedly. "Ask—ask—my daughter to come in."

But Theo had not waited. By the time Gentry had reached the door of the outer office she was crossing the floor. If she spoke quietly it was because of the pressure she put on her excitement.

"Father, I want to tell you that—that I'm coming home."

In his agitation he could do no more than motion her to a chair. "Wha-what are you doing that for?"

Expecting this question, she had phrased her answer beforehand. "Because I've found out that unless you give me money he doesn't want me."

"Doesn't want you—or can't afford you?"

Her voice had something like a sob in it. "He doesn't try to afford me. He just lets me go."

Shaking so that he could hardly speak, he used the fewest words possible. "Tell me about it."

She told him what she could, incoherently, with hesitations, and yet making her point clear. He had sent her away. That was what it came to. Her father would remember that when in the spring she had declined his invitation to go home George had begged that it should stand open. She had suspected then, she had suspected long before that, what was in his mind, but only of late had he shown it frankly.

Blent found himself able to say, "Has he shown that he isn't in love with you?"

"We never got to that."

"How do you mean that you never got to it? Wouldn't it be the first question to come up?"

"Not in our case, because the first question had to be money. If we'd had money, even a little more than we did have—"

"And he couldn't make a little more. That's what I told you from the first."

She nodded, looking down at her hands. For the reason that she had developed a life in which he had little or no share, he found it hard to approach her. Except for the half hour spent in the flat in Butter Street he had not seen her for a year, and precisely for the year of greatest change in her. Having thought of her chiefly as an adjunct to himself, he saw her now as a woman with cares and interests to which he was an outsider. His Theo, the child of his inner self, had been swept out on a sea of her own sorrows and resentments. He must bring her back. Luckily, he knew how.

For already his own skies were clearing. The anxieties which up to a few minutes previously had weighed on him with such a leaden heaviness were lifting like a mist. The half plans he had almost broached aloud began to seem ridiculous. Theo was coming of her own accord to justify all he had foreseen. He had only to stand pat. Like a spring released he found himself rebounding to the dictatorial attitude which neither bends nor accepts compromise.

"It's just as well that you should have found that out, because"—his tone grew tender toward her—"because, as I've told you already, he's the type of fellow for whom there's no future."

She agreed with him bitterly. "That's what he says

himself. But that a man should be satisfied to have no future—”

“Oh, he’s not satisfied.” Panting, he struggled on. “You must do him justice. He can’t help himself. Thirty years from now—if you went on living with him—when perhaps you’d have half a dozen children—he’d still be getting his forty-five a week, if he was getting anything, while you . . . It breaks my heart to think of what you might become in thirty years from now—your beauty gone—your spirit broken—your fingers worked to the bone—”

She was unexpectedly direct. “Do you mean that if you died you wouldn’t leave me any money?”

He thought it better to be frank with her. “It’s curious that you should ask me that, because I was just working on the point.” He laid his hands on the documents before him. “This is the will I made two years ago. After the usual provision for your mother, and a few odds and ends of bequests, you, Spen, and Sheila come in, in equal shares, for the whole of my estate. This is the codicil I drew up this morning, and may execute this afternoon.”

“In which you cut me off?”

“Not exactly. In which I lay down the conditions you know already. So long as you remain his wife—nothing. If you leave him and become free again, you come in for everything you’d have had if you’d never married him.”

“And do you think that fair to me?”

“I think it right and just.”

“If it’s so right and just, why did you never warn me against such a marriage all the years when I was growing up?”

"For the same reason that I never warned you not to commit suicide."

"And if you meant, in case I displeased you, to cast me off, why didn't you have me taught to earn my own living?"

"Because I never dreamt that a child I loved as I've loved you would have displeased me."

"You mean, you never dreamt that I'd marry a man simply because I cared for him."

"Be just to me, dear. What have I done beyond showing you what the fellow is?"

There was a note in her voice which he could only call sardonic. "Oh, you've done that quite successfully. You've made me despise him."

"And that only hurts you the more. Is that it?"

"I'd rather hate him."

"Which you don't."

"No, I don't. But to go on loving a man whom you despise—"

"Yes, but even there you mustn't go to extremes. You must take him for what he is, an honest, industrious chap, with the limitations of his class."

"You say that because he lets me go without putting up a fight. I've told him already that if he had the spirit of a man—"

"But isn't that what I've been trying to make you see? That kind of fellow can't have the spirit of a man. It would be all that his job is worth. It isn't his fault. It's part of his situation. If you're leaving him because you think him contemptible—"

"Which is exactly what I'm doing."

"Then take care you're not making a mistake. You've hinted already that contempt is not incompatible with love."

"It's still contempt."

"Have you told him so?"

"I've told him so."

"And what did he say?"

"As far as I could see he accepted the situation."

"And do you think you saw very far?"

Springing up, she began to move aimlessly about the room. "Oh, what do you gain by putting me to this torture?"

"It's not what I gain but what you gain. You mustn't take a step now that you'll want to untake later on."

"Why do you say that, when you've told me already that I've no choice but to come home?"

"If you come home you must know why you're doing it. It can't be from anger or pique."

"What difference does it make so long as I come?"

"It makes the difference that when anger and pique have died out, as they generally do, you may want to go back to him again."

"If I do, I suppose I can go."

"But perhaps I couldn't stand it. I'm pretty well all in as it is—"

She came to the desk and looked down at him. "If I've had anything to do with that, father, I'm sorry. But things have gone very hard with me."

"All the more reason why we should keep them from going any harder. Not only must you know what you're doing, but I must know what I'm doing, too. I can't be satisfied with your side of the story alone. I must see where we all stand by—by having the young man in."

He had touched the bell button before she could spring and catch his hand. "Oh, father, don't, please!



I've left him. I told him I would last night. I don't want to see him and go through it all again."

But Gentry was already padding across the room.

"Ask Mr. Pevensey to come in and see me."

Gentry padded out again, while Theo threw herself into a chair, her blazing black eyes on the door through which her husband would appear.

## *Chapter XXII*

GEORGE'S entrance was not unlike that of a sullen, frightened bull into the arena where he is to fight. Haggard, lowering, with lips compressed, he stood barely within the doorway. Seeing Theo, who gave him no recognition, he drew back more suspiciously.

Blent's tone was not unkindly. "Come over here."

Without a glance at Theo, he limped toward the desk, where he remained standing.

"My daughter has told me that she's left you."

George made the slightest inclination. "Yes, sir. She told me last night she was going to."

"And haven't you done anything to keep her?"

"There was nothing I could do."

In spite of herself, Theo, who sat gazing up at him, broke in with a deep contralto reproachfulness. "Oh, George, if you'd only been half as strong as I thought you were—"

Blent spoke with the tendency of the whole family to discuss George as if he had not been there. "He is, in his way. Only there are different kinds of strength. Haven't you noticed that we'll say of one man that he's as strong as a lion, and of another that he's as strong as an ox? This man is an ox. But oxen have their uses. In business they're the patient plodders—"

"The dumb driven cattle," Theo put in, with a sympathy torn from her.

"Exactly. It's the name for them. But remember

that they wouldn't be dumb driven cattle if they were fit to be anything else."

"George says they never get a chance to be anything else."

"Business is as full of chances as it ever was; but the dumb driven cattle never see them. They do their work with their heads downward and their eyes on the ground. They're driven to the office every morning, as oxen to the field. They're driven home at night, as oxen to the stall. It's as if there was some big hand behind them brandishing a whip."

George intervened on a note of discussion of which the overtones were dangerous. "I've heard it said, sir, that these oxen, the men who get from two or three thousand dollars a year, like myself, pay more of the nation's taxes than any other class."

"I believe that's true; and they do more of the nation's drudgery; but they pay as they work, like oxen, and never give a kick."

Theo's sympathies were shown in her distress. "But don't oxen ever go mad?"

"They do; and you shoot them at sight."

"But aren't you ever afraid of these millions and millions of oxen, in case they should all go mad together, and gore and trample you?"

"No, for one reason because we've got the guns, and for another, because oxen never organize."

She was mystified. "Never organize? What's that got to do with it?"

"You've heard of strikes?"

"Yes, of course."

George's slow voice came to Blent's aid. "You've heard of miners striking, and steelmen, and railwaymen—"

"But did you ever hear of a strike of clerks in offices, or salesmen in shops, or bookkeepers in banks—?"

"I never noticed."

"Well, notice now. Bricklayers are getting twelve dollars a day, and may soon be striking for more. This man is working for seven, and will go on working for seven till the Day of Judgment."

She lifted a puzzled, indignant face. "Yes, but, George, why do you? Isn't it all there in a nutshell?"

"Wasn't that explained to you a year ago, when you were told that I was a bit of raw material caught in the machine? Hasn't it been explained to you again to-day? I'm one of the dumb driven cattle, who work with eyes on the ground and without a kick."

"And is that what you mean to be always?"

"Hasn't that been explained to you, too? There's no chance for me to be anything else. If I was to pull out of the machine I should starve. If the oxen went mad and stampeded they'd be shot."

"Well, wouldn't you rather starve or be shot than be what you are?"

"You must be reasonable, dear. He's got his job. He must stick to it."

George's dragging, halting utterance again had that dangerous note in it. "Yes, sir; and as you said a year ago, government, law, and religion are all on that side, aren't they?"

Blent allowed himself to be sententious. "Government, law, and religion were instituted—"

"For people like me—to keep us in our places—to make us work. We're drilled from our childhood to reverence them. But with people like you, sir, it's

different. You can bulldoze the government; you can dictate the law; you can sidestep religion. But if we were to try it we'd be traitors to the country. You'd all be crying out to have us hanged." He turned to his wife. "You see, that's why I must stick to my job and my forty-five a week. If our crowd asked for the same pay as bricklayers a big banker wouldn't be able to rake in his thousand every twenty-four hours."

Blent was annoyed by the impertinence. "What a big banker can rake in is not your affair."

The soft slow voice emphasized the suavity. "No, sir; but we make it our affair. We talk over your financial methods, of course. We talk you over. There's hardly a detail of your private life and character back to—back to before you married Miss Augusta Spencer—that we're not familiar with. Everyone in the bank, down to the messenger boys getting ten and fifteen a week, knows your income within a few thousands."

"And it's because you know so much," Blent raged, losing control of himself, "that you schemed to make love to an innocent young girl and get her to run away with you."

"Yes, sir."

At the laconic answer Theo was amazed. "Why, no, he didn't, father."

"You thought," Blent fumed on, taking no notice of Theo's interpolation, "that I'd come across with money and promotion in the bank."

"Yes, sir."

"I told him that," Theo insisted. "I thought you'd surely do for us what mother's father did for her and you."



Blent continued to disregard her. "And when you saw I wouldn't you didn't want her."

"That's it exactly, sir. When I saw you wouldn't I didn't want her."

"Oh, father, that wasn't it at all."

"In fact, you practically turned her out of doors."

"If you like to express it in that way."

Theo sprang up indignantly. "He didn't do anything of the kind. I left of my own accord."

"And so long as I don't come across with the money you don't want her back."

"I'm willing to put it more strongly. So long as you don't come across with the money I wouldn't take her back."

Blent's cry was triumphant. "You hear that, Theo?"

With a gesture of protest she moved in between them. "May I ask the meaning of all this?"

"You'll find that out later, dear. It'll help you—"

George bent toward her with a slight inclination. "To get back your freedom, when the time comes."

"Then the whole thing is a bit of farce."

Controlling his rage to a kind of blustering politeness, Blent addressed George alone. "I think, then, we've said all we need to say—"

"With the exception of one detail, sir."

"Well? What is it?"

"I shall not be at the bank to-morrow, nor the next day, nor the day after that, nor any day from now on."

"If you're doing that because these complications have come up—"

"No, sir; not at all. It's only that I want to be done with you and yours for life."

"George!"

"That'll do," Blent commanded. "You're turning her away," he said to Pevensey, "because I won't give her any money. And you're leaving him," he went on to Theo, "because you consider him—I'm using your own word—because you consider him contemptible. At the same time," he continued to George, "you can't be done with me and mine till you're done with us legally—"

"I'm ready to admit any charges it may suit you to bring against me."

"And when that's done, I must still make good my promise that you shouldn't be out of pocket. I forget if I said one hundred thousand or two, but I'll say now that it will be two. After that, if you choose to disappear—"

"I couldn't wait so long, sir. Your daughter was good enough to remind me last night that in the matter of buying me off you'd be as good as your word. But I'm in too much of a hurry. The legal part of it can be put through without me. I want to feel when I leave this place this afternoon that I'm through with a family of cads."

"You damned impertinent—"

As George limped toward the door that would take him into the bank Blent sprang to his feet and thumped the desk in front of him. But the act and the exclamation were too much for him. He fell back strangling.

"Father! Father!"

Theo was on her knees beside him. With a great effort he was able to articulate. "Just—just run to the ca-cabinet over there—and get me—"

After the restorative he was able again to sit up at the desk, though his speech was more difficult.

"We-well, we've se-seen the last of him."

The attack, of which she had witnessed a great many, having passed, she moved to the fireplace, where she rested a hand on the mantelpiece and a foot on the low fender. Looking down on her, the face of Theodosius Spencer had a bland remoteness from earthly suffering. Yet he had suffered in his time, bequeathing suffering to his son Josiah, to his granddaughter Augusta, and now to his great-granddaughter Theodosia. None of them escaped. Wealth was no protection. The only hope was that some day they might reach the gentle blank immunity from pain which old portraits seem to take on.

With a sigh in which there was something of a moan she echoed her father's words. "Yes, we've seen the last of him."

"Legally he's abandoned you."

"I suppose that that's what you were trying to bring out."

"Yes, and I brought out more than I expected."

"It was more than I expected, too. I had no idea he saw through us so acutely."

"Saw through us? What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? He himself put it pretty neatly. We are a family of cads." Leaving the fireplace, she went round the desk, coming to a halt in the center of the room, where she stood reflecting. "The English have a rule of good manners we might do well to profit by."

"Yes? And what rule is that?"

"That you can insult your equals if you like; but

you must never insult a man whose position is lower than your own."

"And have we insulted this fellow?"

"We've been damnable."

"So that you don't despise him as much as you did."

"On the contrary, I despise him more. If he has all that in him, and still makes no attempt to keep me—"

"He practically kicks you out."

She inclined her head, without speaking.

"Because you didn't have the cash."

She inclined her head again.

"But if you were to get the cash he'd be glad to welcome you back."

She inclined her head the third time.

"Pretty bitter, isn't it?"

She made the same silent answer.

"But you'll learn your lesson, dear, and, as your Aunt Katty says, get over it. You'll have your divorce, and meet some one else, more of your own position in the world—"

She dropped into one of the round-backed chairs. "Father, may I ask you a question? Did my grandfather think you an ox when you came and told him you'd married mother?"

"He knew I wasn't."

"Did he ever treat you as you've been treating George Pevensey?"

"He tried to; but he couldn't keep it up."

"Did he ever treat mother as you've been treating me?"

"He'd have done it, but he didn't dare. You see, dear, it was another case of the ox and the lion; and

I was the lion. I know what you're driving at; but you'll never get the rights of it till you see that as far as the east is distant from the west is the difference between this fellow Pevensey and what I ever was at any time."

Getting up restlessly, she began to move about again. "Oh, I see that plainly enough; and yet, if it hadn't been for the way things have turned out, I could have been satisfied with *him*."

"And I saved you from anything so fatal. One of these days, perhaps when I'm lying in my grave, you'll thank me for what I'm doing at this minute."

"Oh, father, what's the use of my thanking you when you're lying in your grave, if I can't thank you now? Now is the time I know about. Wouldn't it mean more to you to see me happy with your living eyes, than to break my heart to-day, with a view to mending it to-morrow?"

"Two years hence you'll feel differently."

"I'm not thinking about two years hence; I'm thinking about now. It's now that I've got to suffer, father. It's now that you could help me."

"I'm helping you in the wisest way—"

"I don't care anything about the wisest way. I care for the man I love."

"And I've shown him to you as he is."

"When I didn't want to know. I was satisfied with him as I thought he was—strong and good—"

"But now that you know that he isn't—"

"Do you suppose I'm glad to have found out? Was mother glad to have found out why you married her? Listen to Aunt Katty—"

"Aunt Katty is a wicked old woman—"



"She's a truthful old woman, who spares nobody, not even you."

At the reference to the way he had married her mother he had paled. To learn that his children knew what he supposed to be a secret was a cut that went very near his heart. He sagged in his chair, speaking feebly.

"Theo dear, I can't keep this up. It's—it's killing me. You must take my word for things and trust me to be right. You'll see it some day for yourself; but in the meanwhile bear with me—and—and come and give me a kiss."

Standing where she was, her dark eyes looked at him steadily. "I don't want to do that, father."

He gasped as if he had been cut a second time. "Why not?"

"Because I don't."

"If you feel that I've been hard on you—"

"If I feel anything at all, it's that you haven't been a good father to me—never—never."

"Not a good father? You can say that?"

"You brought me up to be useless, helpless, with no independence. When I tried to get work everyone could see that I wasn't able to do anything. You'd given me habits of luxury which unfitted me for any kind of life but one with plenty of money, and when I needed it most you refused me. You let me go about among young men, lots of them as poor as mice, with any one of whom I might have fallen in love, and if I had you'd no intention of helping me. You brought home to Old Tilbury a handsome young fellow who'd made good in the war, and asked me to amuse him and you never gave a thought to the chance of my coming to care for him."

Covering his face, he mumbled into his own hands: "How could I? . . . So far beneath you . . . a common bookkeeper . . ."

With rising voice, and an occasional gesture, she began to pace up and down. "When I did come to care for him, you were not a father to me; you were an executioner. When the merest pittance from your great wealth would have saved my happiness you chose to wreck it. It was out of my wrecked happiness that you meant to rebuild your plans. For a whole year you allowed me to struggle to do for my husband what a woman of his own class would have done; and now that I've failed you're triumphant. How can you expect me to love you, father? I'm coming home to you because I've nowhere else to go. But if I had, it would be the last spot in the world where I should look for shelter."

With his face still in his hands, he shook his head, his shoulders slightly rocking. "That's hard," she caught of his muttering. "My God! that's hard."

She continued to pace up and down. "It's not harder than I feel, father."

"After all I've done for you."

She flung it at him in passing. "And haven't done."

Lowering one hand, he rested his forehead on the other. "You're the only one in the world who could have dealt this blow at me. . . . I've never loved anyone as I've loved you. . . . I love Spen and Sheila, of course. . . . Your mother and I get along fairly well. . . . But you! . . . Since the first time they ever let me look at you . . . a little baby twenty minutes old . . . you've not been an hour out of my thoughts. . . . I was so proud of you . . . so proud . . . you were so beautiful . . . and brilliant . . . so

likely to crown my work by . . . by doing something wonderful . . .”

His voice had grown fainter; his head began to sink; but in her intense concentration and feverish pacing she noticed no change in him.

“Yes, that’s it,” she cried, desperately. “I was to crown your life. I was to be an additional bit of your property. I was to be like your money, or your house, or the pictures and silver you’ve bought at the big sales. I was to do something wonderful so that you could be proud of it. But I wasn’t to have a life of my own. I wasn’t to be myself. I was to be part of you. I was to love and marry in a way to make you a bigger man than you are already.”

His head sank lower, his elbows spreading wider apart, but she never glanced his way.

“My heart didn’t count. My happiness didn’t count. You no more hesitated to crush them both than if I’d had no right to them. I shall never forgive you, father. I’ll go home. I’ll live in your house. But I’ll always be thinking of how soon I can get away from it.”

His head had now touched the desk, where it rested on his outstretched arms.

“You want me to marry again as soon as I’m free. I shall be eager to do it. I’ll do it as soon as you can find a man to suit your ambitions and who’ll be willing to take me. I shan’t care who he is, or what he is, or whether or not he’ll be a brute to me. As long as I can get away from you—”

Swinging round with one of her passionate movements, her eye chanced to light on him. As if his bulk would push the chair away, his body had slumped

back into it, while his forehead still rested on the desk. She stood for a minute startled.

"Father!"

Having given one great pound, her heart seemed to stop. She crept nearer him, and a little nearer. With her hand lightly on his shoulder she spoke again:

"Father!"

She shook him gently. Lifting his head, she found it so heavy and unresponsive that she let it drop. The soft thud it made in falling on the hands filled her with wild terror. Running to the door, she called into the public portion of the bank.

"Some one come and help me!"

Back beside him, she found the huge body to have slipped farther back in the chair. Trying to raise him, she tugged helplessly. Mr. Priest, a thin, canny man with steely eyes, was the first to appear in the office.

"What's up?"

"Hold him."

He steadied the body while Theo put a spoonful of the restorative to the lips. "Oh, he won't take it."

Meanwhile Spen had run in and seen what she was doing. "Here! That isn't the right way! Let me!" But having taken the spoon, he, too, was unsuccessful. "No, he won't take it."

Stone had now appeared on the threshold, his unlighted cigar in his mouth. "My God!" Turning back to the open door, he called, loudly, "Is there a doctor in the bank?"

A clerk's voice came in reply: "There was a doctor here half a minute ago. Gone into Peabody's, next door."

"Run! Get him! Get anybody! Yell for a doctor in the street!"

As he crossed the floor Spen and Priest continued to steady the body. Theo made another attempt to give him the restorative. Gentry, too, had stolen in, wringing his hands helplessly.

"Oh dear! Oh dear! Just what I've been afraid of this long spell back."

"Here," Stone said, with ominous significance, "we'd better help him to lie down."

But Theo objected. "Oh, lying down is always so hard for him when he's like this."

"He won't mind it—now. Say, boys, we've got to lift him. Want another strong hand." Going to the glass door, he called through it, "George Pevensey, come here."

As George entered, shy and wondering, Stone took the lead. "There's no two ways about it. We've got to lay him down. Here, George, you and Spen take his shoulders. Priest and me'll manage the legs. Give a hand, Gentry. Don't stand blitherin' there like an old goat."

While the five men bore the big body, Theo had shaken up the pillow on the couch. Opening the rug, she stood ready to spread it over him. This done, she turned to Spen appealingly.

"I wonder if he could take a spoonful now. Try."

But the doctor, a dark young man with thick red lips and a mustache, was hurrying in through the glass door. "Is this where—?"

Theo hastened toward him. "Oh, doctor, my father has had another attack—"

"Let's see."

There followed the usual things that doctors do.



Leaning over, he felt the pulse. He knelt down and put his ear to the heart. He lifted the eyelids. He put his ear to the heart again. Again he felt the pulse. When at last he stood up it was to look toward Stone, who seemed to be in command, with a shake of the head and a silent, fatalistic gesture.

## *Chapter XXIII*

THE shock of a great calamity does not come all at once. The mind being able to receive but a few things at a time, it takes them as they come. Looking at the young doctor, who stood shaking his head beside the couch on which her father's body lay covered with a rug, Theo could not get beyond a solitary terror.

"Oh, doctor, he's not dead?"

"I'm afraid he is. The seizure could have lasted only a few minutes before it was all over."

There was a moment of stricken hesitation, such as cannot be maintained for long. Then the group began to break up. Priest accompanied the doctor back into the bank. Gentry retreated to his own door, where he stood like a broken-hearted dog. To be at a distance from Theo and Spen, George limped to the fireplace, his back turned to all of them. Stone, from force of habit, picked up his unlighted cigar and thrust it between his lips. Each was trying in his way to realize this sudden circumstance of death. The man who had been the mastering influence in all their lives was now but a feature of the past. To-morrow he would be more in the past than he was to-day. In a year they would have begun forgetting him. They had started on the process already, as each thought of the next thing to be done.

Only the son and daughter were still in the grasp of the figure whose outlines showed beneath the rug. Neither could think further than the fact that this

mighty force had stopped. They had loved it at the worst of times, and even in its cruelties. Now that it no longer worked, it was as if the globe could not keep turning on its axis.

Dominated by this sense of loss, they stood looking down at the rigid upturned face, of which the patchy redness was already paling to a waxen white, till Theo became conscious that her brother was beside her. Throwing herself on his breast, she sobbed, in self-accusation:

"Oh, Spen, he's dead, and I've killed him!"

The uneasy tenderness he had felt for her during the past few months passed into a resentment which pushed her away. "Yes, and I hope you're satisfied."

Taking the cigar from his mouth, Stone strode toward them. "Come now, young people, none o' that. Spen, your sister's in great trouble."

"I'm in great trouble too."

"Yes, but you don't think yourself to blame. She does, don't you see? What she needs is some one to buck her up, not to make her feel worse. You've got to be a father to your sisters now, and have some size to you in being it. And, Theo, you mustn't begin that kind o' talk. You didn't kill him, not any more than I did. We all knew, Priest and me and the lot of us, that his life was hangin' by a thread. What happened to-day might have happened a month ago, or a year ago, just as easy as now."

She cried through her weeping. "Oh, but you don't know."

"Sure I know. I know everything, as well as you and"—he pointed at George, who had turned again toward them—"as well as you—and him. Your father and me was talkin' it over not an hour ago."

Theo controlled herself sufficiently to go toward the desk, where she put her hand on the paper lying on the blotting pad. "Oh, but since that time he told me he was going to sign this."

"That codikle? Pff! I'd never ha' let him. Was playin' him, just like you'd play a fish."

George moved uneasily away from the fireplace, making toward the door. "Perhaps, Mr. Stone, I'd better go back to my work."

"Wait a minute, George. Got something to say to you. Spen, you've plenty to do and you'd better be doin' it."

Spen, who again stood looking down at the figure on the couch, spoke huskily, "I must call up my mother—"

"Don't call her up. Go out to Old Tilbury and tell her face to face. Me and Theo and"—a nod included Pevensey—"and George'll see to everything here." Putting his arm over Spen's shoulder, he steered him toward the door. "I'll attend to the undertaker. Have me own. Watersby his name is. Old friend of your father's and mine. All three of us at school together in the old days in Brooklyn. Had him do all my undertakin' since the day I buried my poor father. First-class work he does, too, so you needn't be afraid of nothin' cheap."

Having reached the glass door, he patted Spen on the shoulder and gently pushed him back toward the bank. But on turning he saw Gentry, still with his air of a broken-hearted dog, waiting to be told where to go.

"See here, me man, haven't you got nothin' better to do than listen in on talk that don't concern you?"

Gentry disappeared as if a wind had blown him

away; Stone then turned to George and Theo, who stood with eyes averted from each other. Theo had ceased weeping, though an occasional sob still racked her.

"George, I want you to do something for me. Call up Main, five-six-seven-eight. Ask for Mr. Watersby. Tell him what's happened here. Say you're speakin' for me and ask him to come right over."

George hesitated. "I'm not sure that Theo would like me to—"

"Sure she'd like you to." As Theo neither looked round nor spoke and George began limping toward the door, the family friend broke in again. "And one thing more. I don't know what's up between you two, but I know there's something. Well, that'll be between yourselves. Still, if one of these days you want to talk it over—"

He looked from the one to the other, but neither said a word.

"Ah, well! You know your own business best. I wouldn't ask to be let in on it only that I was *his* oldest and nearest friend. Him and me was chums from the time we were ten years old. When I got into the Hudson River National Bank, as it was in them days, I begged a job for him. When he came to be president of the trust, after it was organized, he worked it so that I was made vice-president. We sure were fond of each other. Sometimes you'll find it that way between two men that's been through thick and thin and together. Passin' the love o' women, the Bible calls it; and, by golly! the man that said that knew something about the human heart. Now, George, you'd better be off. We've lost time as it is. He'll be gettin' cold."



George having gone, Stone moved toward Theo, slipping his arm across her shoulder.

"Theo, me dear," he said, drawing her toward the couch, "you've got to make your peace with him; but when you do it make it sensible. Don't blame yourself; don't accuse yourself. Don't—*don't*—say what you said to Spen just now, that you killed him. You didn't. If anything, he killed himself, poor fellow, with his great big tempers. Always warned him he would. Warned him only this morning. There now! I'll leave you here for a spell by yourself. Have another cry. It'll do you good. You haven't cried half enough yet. There, there now."

She did not cry again, but she dropped to her knees, bowing herself down on the rigid form. Stone picked up the unlighted cigar he had laid on the desk and once more thrust it between his lips. At the door he turned for a last long look, the cigar traveling at a prodigious rate of speed from one corner of his mouth to the other.

## *Chapter XXIV*

WHAT struck George Pevensey first on returning to his own part of the bank was the silence of the typewriters. As their click-click-click hummed to all the working hours, the present hush was like the stoppage of the engines on a ship at sea. A big throb had been stilled. With awed faces people stood about and wondered what the trouble was.

The first brief news had spread quickly. Clerks, stenographers, messenger boys had heard that the Big Chief was dead, but had heard no more. A whisper was passing that business, as if too stricken to go on, was to be suspended for the day, and as it flew each occupant of desk or pen stood up. Nevertheless, as George limped by, no one ventured to question him. Friendly always, he was always distant, and they recognized the fact.

Billy Maggs alone felt warranted in striding forward, lowering his voice confidentially. "Say, George, how did it happen?"

George pressed the hand which had taken his own as if it was that of one in grief. "I know no more than you do, Billy. All I can tell is that he's gone. Theo was with him and he seems to have collapsed while they were talking." He added, as if to escape more details, "Just come from calling up the undertaker."

As Billy went away George took up his hat and stick, meaning to leave the bank and to leave it finally. Though he had said nothing to Harrison, to whom

he should have given his notice, he had by no means repented of his words that he was through with a family of cads. The fact that Theo would be coming in for money was above all things to make no difference. If he was going in any case, he must now do it quickly. Self-respect required it.

His one remaining duty was to report to Mr. Stone, in the latter's private office, the answer received from Mr. Watersby. This was simple. The undertaker and his men would be on the spot as soon as they could get there. Stone thanked him, taking him by the arm and leading him the few steps down the passage to the door behind which lay the dead man.

"Theo's there with her father, George. Better go in."

He stuttered out the readiest excuse, "I-I-I don't think she wa-wants me."

"Sure she wants you. Besides, it's not a question of what she wants, but of what you want. You're master. Be master, George. Don't begin to rule your life by what your wife wants and doesn't want. It's her business to want what you do."

He left him at the door. George turned the knob and went in. But the room was empty except for the figure on the couch. That could be deserted now, could in a measure be ignored. Those whose steps had depended on the will which up to an hour ago had been exerted here were going their ways independently. His own feeling was of stealthiness, like a burglar's, in being in the room at all.

But he was looking for Theo. Stone having taken off the repression which since last night he had put upon himself, the longing to see her came back with a force he thought he had overcome. Just to see her!

—to murmur a few words!—a few loving words perhaps!—and then go forever! It was easy enough to say last night, in a minute of mutual resentment, that the less mitigation the better; but it wasn't so. He didn't forgive her; he wasn't asking for her back; but he knew that if he could only get a glimpse of her it would give him fortitude.

So he waited, standing by the couch. There being two doors to the room, she might come through either. To the couch he turned his back. Even he could forget the object lying there.

A door opened softly, but it was only Gentry. George felt the need of explaining his presence in the room.

"I'm waiting for my wife—Mr. Blent's daughter."

Gentry informed him that Theo had left some ten minutes earlier. She had gone out by a side door and had said something about "going home."

It was now a question as to what she meant by home. It might be Blentwood. On the other hand, it might be Butter Street. It would be the more natural that it should be Butter Street. When a woman has a family home and her own home, it is the latter she calls *home*. If she had not meant Butter Street she would have used the words Blentwood or Old Tilbury even in speaking to Gentry.

But when he reached Butter Street there was no one there. The flat was chill and sinister. He had often come back to it earlier than she, but never when he didn't expect her. He expected her now. To expect her was in the nature of the situation. She might not come to stay with him; he didn't ask for that; but in view of what had happened through the

day a few more words would be essential. He himself had only reached there first; she must be on the way.

So he sat and smoked and waited. Strange as it was, to be idling like this at three on a week day afternoon, it was all there was to do. If she didn't come back she might ring. He must keep within sound of the telephone. After all, he reasoned, it was probable that she had gone to Blentwood. At such a time her first impulse would be to fly to her mother. Of course! How could he complain of it? She had probably driven down with Spen.

He reckoned up the minutes it would take them to reach Old Tilbury, the time she would spend crying with her mother, and a half hour at least for explanation and discussion. This would take them till five, after which he might expect a call from her. Fixing his longings on that hour, it began to seem like something understood between them.

Then there would be the settling of the date for the funeral. He would not be consulted as to that, of course, but Theo would like him to know when it was to be. She would want him to attend it—or would she? After the bitter things he had flung out that morning she might hesitate. . . .

But five o'clock came, and six, and seven, and eight, and there was no ring at the telephone. With nine, and ten, and eleven he understood that she would not call him up that night. He understood even more. She was gone. When she had left the flat that morning she had left for good. There was nothing more to wait for or look forward to.

And as a matter of fact Theo was saying the same thing about him. She, too, was waiting to be called to



the telephone. Five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven! When eleven o'clock struck she, too, was making up her mind that since he hadn't called already he would not call at all. There was nothing more to wait for or look forward to.

Not but what the thought was as inconsistent with her purposes, as it was with his. She was far from seeking a reconciliation. Forgiveness was out of the question. Out of the question from the first, it was more so from what had happened. But at least he might speak a word to her. She had grown used to the comfort of his arms, to the soothing invigoration of a voice which had never failed to help her even when he himself had been helpless. In this hard experience she needed it more than she had ever needed anything in her life; and he said nothing.

She had left the bank hurriedly and secretly so as to be alone. If Mr. Stone were to see her he might send her down in the motor car with Spen. In the streets, in the subway, in the train, she could draw within herself and think. She could hardly reach the family quickly enough to tell them she was ready with her expiation.

She learned from Hannah, who admitted her, that Spen had arrived about half an hour earlier and had broken the bad news. The shock of the past few minutes having made all other matters trivial, he showed no surprise at seeing her.

"Come in, Miss Theo; come in. You must 'ave 'eard."

"Yes, I was there."

"All the family's in the living room, just as if he was coming 'ome to dinner. But he won't. There's only one wye he'll come now."

Theo went straight to the great room, where, as she stood at the top of the three steps, the group below stared up at her. It was formed as she had so often seen it, her mother, Sheila, and Spen in the center of the room, Aunt Katty in her big winged chair, apart and independent, a newspaper spread across her knees. It was she who gave the first welcome.

"Lost no time in getting back, did you? now that there's no one to keep you away."

"Theo!" Mrs. Blent had risen and bustled forward. "Oh, my darling, have you heard the awful news? Your father—"

She had Theo in her arms as Spen said, indignantly: "She was there and saw it all, mother. Isn't that what I've been telling you? If she'd only not gone near him he'd have been home as usual."

Sheila was prompt in her sister's defense. "How can you say that, when you don't know anything about it? Theo's done the best she could. I hope that now she's coming back to us."

Released from her mother's arms, Theo threw herself into her sister's. "Oh, Sheila darling! I've missed you so much. Nearly a year! Yes, I'm back for a little while, but after that I don't know." She turned to her mother. "Mother dear, could I have a cup of tea? I had hardly any breakfast, and of course no lunch at all—and everything's been so awful."

"You'll get over it," Aunt Katty croaked, cheerfully. "Lord! the people I've seen die! Cried my eyes out over some of them, and now I don't care a hang. That's the way it'll be with you."

That was the way, in fact, that it had begun to be

already. Subconsciously Theo was aware that to the family the blow had been one of consternation rather than of grief. There was some grief, of course. They had loved him, but with a stormy love in which there was always something to be afraid of. In subtle ways she noticed a relief from constraint. For her mother, for Spen, for Sheila, a pressure at once mighty and capricious had been taken off. They had all been crying, even Spen; and yet, now that their tears were dried, they had a sense of being able to relax with a long, sure relaxation. She, Theo, alone must take the situation as a tragedy.

Though it was only three o'clock, time had so lost its significance that tea was brought for them all. They took it with relish. Restored from her faintness, Theo felt the necessity of explaining herself and her part in her father's death. With her impulsive nature, so ready to make plans, she was eager to announce her program of amends.

"You see, George and I had made up our minds to—to separate."

"Oh, Theo, you hadn't," Sheila cried, reproachfully.

"Or, rather"—she steadied her voice with an effort—"he'd made up his mind, and of course I—I couldn't go on living with a man who didn't want me."

"If every woman left her husband because she knew he didn't want her," Aunt Katty commented, "there'd hardly be a married couple in the country."

"Go on, dear," came sympathetically from Mrs. Blent.

"I don't want to go into it all again," Theo took up, bravely, "but for a long time past I'd begun to see him as—as what darling papa said he was. It wasn't

his fault; he couldn't help himself. He was caught, and couldn't get out. The more he tried, the more he was pushed back into the machine, to go on as he'd been before."

Sheila was loyal as George's champion. "Well, you couldn't blame him for that."

"I didn't blame him for anything. It wasn't his fault that he turned out to be a weak man, when I supposed he was a strong one."

"But it was your fault," Spen put in, "that you wouldn't listen to any of us when we told you so."

"But I didn't want to know. I loved him, and in a way I love him still. That's something I shan't get over. But I can live as if I *had* got over it."

"Darling, what do you mean by that," the mother asked, anxiously, "live as if you had got over it?"

"To begin with, I mean that it's not worth while living any other way when—when he doesn't want me to. He said to papa this morning—but I can't tell you. It was all too dreadful. One of the things was that he was done with papa and all who belonged to him—that included me, of course—for life, and that we were a family of—no, I'm not going to say it. It's no use. What it comes to is that he doesn't want me unless I bring him money."

"But you can do that now, can't you?" Sheila reminded her. "I suppose papa will have left some money to us all."

"When a man says of you what he said to darling papa this morning—"

"What was it?" Spen demanded.

"When darling papa asked him if in case he didn't come across with the money he'd want me back, he said that he'd put it even more strongly—that if

darling papa didn't come across with the money he wouldn't take me back. I know he didn't mean it, that he said it only to make us think that he despised us—but he *said* it, and when you've heard a thing like that it doesn't matter to you that it isn't true. The sound of it is what hurts."

"Oh, if you're just going by the sound of things—" Sheila was beginning again, but Theo interrupted her.

"Besides, if I did go back to him I couldn't bring him any money, because darling papa was putting a codicil to his will in which he said I mustn't."

She told this part of the story, which was new to everyone, even to Spen, who pointed out the lack of legal force.

"But he didn't sign it or have it witnessed. It couldn't take effect."

"But I know what he meant; and now that he's gone. . . . You see," she declared, with a passionate cry, "I did kill him. Spen's quite right. If I hadn't gone near him he'd have been home this afternoon."

She went on to detail the stages by which she had crushed the life out of one who had had so slight a hold on it. First there had been the announcement that her disastrous marriage had ended in disaster and that she was coming home. Then there had been the scene with George, in which a proud old man had been pelted with insults from which he had not been able to defend himself. Lastly, she herself had assailed him, had struck at the spots where he was tenderest. She had denied his love, and scoffed at the fatherly goodness which had never failed her till the day when she had put him to defiance. And there had been the end. Up to that he had borne everything. That he couldn't bear. If ever a heart broke, his



had broken. It had broken under her eyes as she looked on, and through her acts and words.

All this she narrated dryly, with the kind of hard emotion which seeks only to make itself convincing. But having drawn up her indictment, she went on to inflict her sentence. She knew what he had hoped to bring to pass, and she was going to see that it was done. She would take what money he left her; she would divorce George; she would marry any man with a high position and resounding name who would marry her. It would be too late now to do darling papa any good, but if those who went before could still see what was happening here, he would know what she was doing to make amends to him. What she had willfully refused him on earth, she would offer him now in heaven, always in the hope that her sacrifice and love would do something to enhance his bliss.

"But, Theo," Sheila objected, "you wouldn't marry a man if you didn't love him, would you?"

"I've had enough of love." The contralto notes vibrated in rejection. "It's not a standby. It's not a guide. George Pevensey loves me, but he puts me out of doors. I love him, and yet I wouldn't go back to him, not if—"

"Oh, but he didn't put you out of doors," Sheila insisted. "He couldn't have—not George."

"Well, let us put it that he begged me to go. I cost him too much money; I ran him into debt. We had so little to live on that when you overstepped your margin by a dollar it became the biggest problem in the world as to how that dollar could be paid. Love didn't matter. Life was a question of dollars and cents, and chiefly of cents. What it simmered down

to was this, that though he loved me and I loved him, we couldn't afford to love, and so I must go back."

Hannah appeared to say that Mr. Stone wished to speak to Mr. Spen on the telephone. Within a few seconds Spen had returned.

"They'll bring him down about ten o'clock."

"I'll stay up," Aunt Katty declared, promptly. "Some one tell Hannah to set my place at dinner. Always said I'd bury Jackson Blent, and here I am doing it."

"And Mr. Stone," Spen explained, further, "said he thought the funeral had better be on Friday, if we considered the day suitable."

"Suitable to me," Aunt Katty assured the company. "Friday or any other day, so long as I'm a chief mourner."

## *Chapter XXV*

OF the whole episode, the return at ten o'clock that night was the most poignant incident. The night was dark, with a strong August wind in which was the scent of rain. They had begun their vigil in the living room as early as eight o'clock. Once the library, in which the dead man was to lie, had been prepared, and a few sheaves of flowers placed about it, there was nothing to do but wait. Taking the clothes for the last toilet, Spen had gone back to town, and Hannah had gone with him. The four women watched alone, three of them awe-stricken, idle, and silent except for a whispered comment now and then. In her big winged chair Aunt Katty dozed, waking from time to time to ask if they hadn't come.

It was Mrs. Blent who most courageously occupied herself with details. "I hope they'll choose that nice mauve gray for the color of the casket. I do dislike black; it's so mournful. Mournful funerals have gone out entirely nowadays. . . . I always remember Mrs. Allenby's funeral; it was so bright. I don't believe that Helen even wore mourning after a week or two. . . . Not but what I think you ought to wear mourning. Kind o' lets people know you're in sorrow. . . . And the hymns! I do hope we'll have some nice cheery hymns with a go to them. Your dear father was so fond of hymns. 'For all thy saints who from their labors rest.' Now there's a hymn that lifts you up. After your dear father had heard it sung at

anyone else's funeral he'd be whistling it for days, and now! . . . Oh dear! . . . How strange life is! . . . Then there's 'Ten thousand times ten thousand,' and 'O Paradise! O Paradise!' He'd have liked both of them, I'm sure."

Slim, virginal, stony-eyed, Sheila said, with disconcerting frankness, "They don't sound a bit like father."

The mother responded, tartly, "Will you kindly suggest a hymn that does?"

The task being difficult, Sheila said no more, while Mrs. Blent trickled on: "That's one thing you'll always notice about funerals. They hardly ever seem to suit the people being buried. But you can't help that. Brighten them up as you may, they've got to be solemn and religious. But you couldn't expect anyone to live up to that beforehand, could you, now?"

This incongruity between death and its victim marked the evening. Considering that they waited for Jackson Blent, the mood in which they did it was ironic. "For all thy saints who from their labors rest." "O Paradise! O Paradise!" The airs came laden with the shoutings and swearings that had filled the house no longer ago than that morning. The effort to see his gross and noisy person suddenly transformed to the celestial put a tax on reverence.

Lapsing from this attempt, Theo thought about George, her solitudes taking the commonplace turn natural to a wife. Where and how had he got his supper? If he had stayed at home and knocked it together for himself, exactly what had he found in the ice chest? If he went out, had he gone to the Blue Dragon of which the specialty was homemade chicken pie, or to the Hungarian Kitchen where the

lamb steaks were so esculent? His socks and underclothes, she was glad to think, were all in good order, but he would be short of handkerchiefs till the laundryman came on Saturday. Could she not buy him some handkerchiefs and mail them to him anonymously? No; that would be re-entering a life from which she had definitely turned away. But if he would only ring her up, there were things she could explain. . . .

Unless he rang up, she couldn't. As to that she was clear. Since he had inflicted the wrongs, his must be the first step. Even if he took it, she would be obliged to answer icily, giving him no encouragement to think she was ever coming back to him. None the less, if he didn't ring her up she would be driven to suppose . . .

But here there came a sense of movement in the house which took her mind away even from the thought of George. Sheila, who had looked out, reported the windows lit up as if they were giving a ball. Primrose, Aunt Katty's man, came to wake her and offer her his arm. One of the footmen opened the front door, filling the house with a sultry wind. Sheila looked out again, coming back to say that there were lights far down the driveway.

Mrs. Blent put her handkerchief to her eyes. "Oh dear! Oh dear! To think of his coming home like this!"

Dreading to go to the outer door, she stood where that of the living room opened into the hall. Sheila, as she had done for a year and more, stood beside her, ready with support. Aunt Katty was seated in a big Italian chair far down the hall, at the entrance to the library. Theo alone looked boldly out, where



the trees tossed wildly, and the lights in the driveway came nearer.

The courtyard seemed crowded with people, though they could only have been the servants, the chauffeurs, the gardeners, and the stablemen. Some of the men had lighted torches, whose flickering made gigantic intermittent shadows. Off at the kennels dogs began to howl, as they howl at the smell of death, a first, a second, and a third. In the background Theo heard a woman laugh, and another woman say, "Shut up."

Presently she made out that coming up the driveway were three vehicles. The first was long and black and ominous. The others were simple touring cars. Spen leaped out of the one, followed heavily by Hannah, while from the other descended Watersby's men, some six or eight in number. In the fantastic waving of the branches under the many lights they were like superhuman beings, monstrous, weird. She stepped back to where her mother was crying softly, and Sheila, as upright as a sword blade, stood with the clear, stony gaze of one who feels a certain hardness even in her sorrow.

On the threshold they heard that strange, soft multiplicity of steps that never accompanies any act but one. Theo knew she would never forget this shuffling. All the feet of all the men who have ever borne the dead seemed to tread in it still, muffled and heart-sickening. It drew nearer and nearer, till two men walking backward passed the door.

Then there were more men, and more, bowed above their burden. They moved slowly. Spen and Hannah moved slowly behind them. All that the women saw was a long gray box, and in it was Jackson Blent. Bereft of his fierce vitality, of his violence of loving,

hating, and commanding, he was a long straight lump of clay, which men in black were carrying.

And yet by morning the family could discuss the invitations to the funeral with no more than a vague sadness. Spen had the pencil and paper, and most of the names to go down went down as a matter of course. Some discussion centered round the name of Stephen Blent, an insurance agent and distant cousin of their father's; and though they had never had anything to do with him, they agreed that he must be asked.

"People will wonder who he is," Mrs. Blent remarked, "but then at funerals all kinds of odds and ends of relations turn up that the friends of the family never heard of."

Sheila said, seemingly in innocence: "And if you walk with mother, Spen, and George walks with Theo, I think Cousin Stephen ought to walk with me. He was father's nearest relative."

The silence was that in which no one glances at anybody else. A glance might betray too much. In the end Mrs. Blent said, tremulously:

"I thought, dear, that you and Theo might walk together, after Spen and me."

"Then would Cousin Stephen go with George?"

Theo was possessed by one of the wild hopes inconsistent with her resolutions. What harm if George did come to the funeral? He was her husband still, and her father's son-in-law. Besides, and this was the force that urged her, it would be a means whereby she could see him again and speak to him.

"I think your way is the best, Sheila dear—George and I, and you and Cousin Stephen."

Spen spoke up, firmly: "I think that Theo and I

had better talk this over between ourselves. Let's go on with the other names."

The other names giving no trouble, an opportunity for Spen and Theo to talk alone was found by their strolling out to the semicircular terrace as soon as the list was completed.

"Look here, Theo," Spen said, in a kindly tone, "I want to be a good brother to you, now that father's gone."

"I'm sure you do, Spen."

"But if you come to talking facts, you'll have to agree that you're not an easy girl to be a good brother *to*."

"Perhaps I'm not."

"I know you've been having a hard time. You look it. What I want to do is to make things easier for you from now on. But the trouble is you've got so many minds. Fellow never knows where to nail you down."

Seated on the balustrade of the retaining wall, Spen swung a slender white-shod foot, and puffed smoke from his cigarette. Theo stood composedly, her dark eyes, in which the blaze never seemed nowadays to die down, roaming the inconspicuous Long Island landscape, drowned in the summer haze.

"If I have so many minds, I suppose it's because my situation has been so difficult. I'll try to be less changeable."

"Well then, when you say that you mean to divorce this fellow and make amends for the part you've played in father's death, how sincere are you?"

She gathered her resources into one big resolve. "I'm quite sincere."

"Were you quite sincere when you told us yesterday that you'd left him?"

She reflected. "I was quite sincere when I told you I'd left him because he asked me to go."

"And what about your ever going back to him?"

"I couldn't do that without giving up father's money. And if I gave up father's money it would be the same old story all over again. We shouldn't be able to afford it."

"Still, if you could afford it—"

"Even then I couldn't forget that he'd once wanted me to leave him."

"So that you've fully made up your mind—?"

"I haven't exactly made up my mind. It seems to me I have no choice. As darling papa said about George, I'm caught."

"Of course you know that you *could* take father's money and do anything you like."

She threw back her head. "Nothing in the world would induce me to. If I take it, it will be on the conditions he laid down to me. The mere fact that he didn't live to sign the codicil makes no difference whatever. As a matter of fact, he would have lived to sign it if I hadn't come to him with my—"

"You see, Theo," he broke in, still in his kindly voice, "you do have a way of putting your foot in it. If you'd only waited a bit you'd have been in a fair way to get everything you wanted. I'll tell you something. It'll show you that I mean well by you. Not long ago I went to father and asked him to climb down about you and your marriage, and to make up his mind to the business."

"Oh, Spen, did you?"

"I told him we'd all been acting in the spirit of old

novels, and that our attitude was *démodé*, out of date."

"How good of you, Spen! And what did he say?"

"He didn't say much. Raved in the same old style. But I believe that, codicil or no codicil, in the end we should have got him."

"Spen, I'd no idea you were so generous—"

"That's not what I'm telling you for. All I want you to see is that if you'd only not rush about and do hasty, impulsive things—"

"I'll try not to."

"But now, don't you see? you're in an entirely different situation. There's no question of making the best of the marriage, because you and the fellow have split. I won't say I'm not glad of it, because I am. I believe it's the best thing that could have happened. You could no more have gone on living with him than if he'd been a Hindu. Been reading lately about the English girls who marry Hindus—seems a lot of 'em do it—and the deuce of a time they have once the first crazy dream is over."

"It wouldn't have been quite so bad as that."

"Well, no matter. You've got to get out of it. I want to see you out of it for your own future happiness. You want the same to carry out father's wishes. Isn't that so?"

Finding a first "Yes" somewhat feeble, she repeated more firmly, "Yes, it is."

"Well then, you can't play fast and loose with him. You can't extend him the recognition of asking him to father's funeral, walking with you behind mother and me, if you mean to give him the boot right afterward. It wouldn't be fair to him. If you've left



him, leave him. If you haven't left him, go back to him."

"But, Spen, I can't go back to him. Don't you see? Everything is against it. Besides, if I didn't have father's money he wouldn't want me. That's what hurts—and makes it impossible."

"Then ought we to ask him for Friday? I put it up to you. If you insist, we'll do it; but I leave it to your common sense."

So it came about that George Pevensey was not invited to the funeral and Jackson Blent was buried as a spiritual warrior. In the little church at Old Tilbury, as much as possible like a village church in Hampshire or Kent, the acclaim was as to a hero who had struggled with sin and death and beaten them.

"The strife is o'er, the battle done,  
The victory of life is won,  
The song of triumph has begun.  
Alleluia."

Sung as they laid him before the altar, this gave the note. Sweeping the senses, it woke those mystic instincts which most men and women associate with their better selves. The big financiers, the Old Tilbury residents, the tellers, clerks, and stenographers who had been brought down by special train, bowed their heads, and felt that sensuous emotional stirring which passes for the prompting of the Holy Ghost. Vaguely, too, they had the comforting assurance that if Jackson Blent could be regarded as a spiritual conqueror, there was plenty of hope for themselves. They spoke of it afterward as "a most impressive ceremony," "a beautiful passing on," glad that the Alleluias came so easily. Sheila alone, erect and hard,

went through it all unbending, unreconciled, resenting the assumptions she rejected as untrue.

But after the grave in the little churchyard had been banked to a long narrow mound and the last of the intimate friends who had waited for this rounding off to the life of Jackson Blent had begun to move away, there came what to Spen was a disagreeable incident. Paget Allenby came up and took his hand.

"Spen, my boy, I've written to your mother to tell her how much I feel for you all in this great trouble; but what I want to say to you is this, that, now that your father has gone, if you ever feel like coming to talk over anything with me I shall always be glad to see you."

Spen was expressing the necessary thanks, when Allenby went on again.

"Oh, and by the way, is your brother-in-law here?"

Spen was so unaccustomed to the word that he stammered. "M-my—?"

"Your brother-in-law—Theo's husband."

"No—no; he didn't come."

Allenby turned away. "Sorry. Been glad of the chance to shake hands with him."

## *Chapter XXVI*

MEANWHILE George Pevensey was making his inclusion or non-inclusion at Jackson Blent's funeral the key to his future relations to his wife. That he would not attend the ceremony did not affect the situation. Theo was now independent. She was probably an heiress. Everything gave her the right to act on her own judgment. If in this tragic crisis in her life she didn't wish him by her side, he would know that she would never wish him there any more.

So he watched the postman's rounds and hung at the end of the telephone. For forty-eight hours he never left the house. Perhaps the solitude affected his nerves; perhaps the morbid fancies were excited by the strain of expectation.

Like Theo herself, he was unstable as to his intentions. On his first night alone he had gone to sleep assuring himself that he would never willingly see her or speak with her again. But he woke in the morning convinced that the day could not pass without some sign from her. When it had so passed his hope centered on the next day. When the next day passed, hope faded into resentment, while resentment slowly burned into anger. Tramping the streets and looking for a job, he went over and over the wrongs he had to charge against her.

For the first time in his life he found himself among the unemployed. He also found himself unable to obtain employment. On leaving the Hudson

River Trust on the day of Jackson Blent's death he had in his pocket eleven dollars and fifty-three cents. Except for his watch, his meager supply of clothing, and the few sticks of furniture in the flat in Butter Street, it was all he had in the world. On the other hand, he had as liabilities two more months of rent, a hundred dollars of debts, and the need of getting food. Merely in getting food eleven dollars and fifty-three cents will not carry anyone very far.

It carried George Pevensey for nearly two weeks, though the food was in diminishing quantities. Past the age at which going hungry for days may be laughed at as a lark, he took it as a humiliation. Restricted, stinted, as he was at all times, he had nevertheless been able to pay for his three meals a day and had expected always to do so. He had expected always to have a few dollars in the savings bank and make one job lead to another. Now it began to seem incredible that he had ever had a job at all. When he entered offices and saw the men at the desks the effort to recall the time when he was as care free as they was like trying to go back to a shadowy Golden Age. His whole life might have been made up of chasing advertisements, of applying at banks on the chance of finding a place. His whole life might have been nourished on a cup of coffee in the morning, a sandwich or two in the middle of the day, and a slice of cold meat in the evening. What was harder to get accustomed to was the shabbiness of the gray summer suit and the shoes worn down at the heels. It was a new humiliation to perceive that his threadbare appearance was against him.

But even more against him was something he had been slow in detecting. He noticed that in banks

where he gave his name the question was nearly always asked :

"Are you by any chance the Pevensey who married—?"

He could generally end it there. "My wife and I separated a short time before her father died."

But the impression left behind was not an easy one. They looked at him as at some one queer. He had done an unusual thing, and men who did unusual things were not, as a rule, those who were wanted as bookkeepers. "I don't think you would suit us." "Well, there doesn't seem to be any opening here." These replies left him with the inference that if it hadn't been for this curious episode he might have been taken on.

Forced to the conclusion that the New York offices were shut against him, he thought of giving up clerical work of every kind and looking for a job as day laborer. This he could probably have found at once, and with better pay than at the Hudson River Trust. The hardship was in climbing down. His people had always been gentlefolk—his father a college professor, his grandfather a doctor. His mother was the daughter of a minister. As far as he could go back, long before a great-great-grandfather had forsaken New England to try his fortunes in the West, his ancestors had been ministers, physicians, lawyers, teachers, the stock out of which the best in America had sprung. Had it not been for his father's death, he himself would probably have entered one of these professions. As it was he had been caught, and turned into a bookkeeper. To go farther out of the hereditary line. . . .

He came down to his last dollar and a few odd



cents. Except for a cup of coffee, he had had no food that day. In the evening he was dizzy, with a light feeling like a bubble. He had eaten so little for a week that he no longer felt hunger; he was only sick and faint. The plate of pasty soup for which he was paying fifteen cents in a cellar frequented by deadbeats would be enough for him. He could not have eaten more even had he been able to afford it.

But while trying to swallow he picked up a paper which his predecessor at the table had left behind. His head swam; the letters danced before his eyes. If he hadn't caught in the heading to a paragraph the name Jackson Blent he could not have forced himself to read the lines.

These informed the reader that the banker's will had been filed for probate at Mineola. There were no public bequests. Of the private bequests the most important was the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars to William Hannah, for many years the testator's butler. Otherwise, the estate, roughly computed to be worth some twenty million dollars, was left entirely to the family. Half of it was to form a trust for the benefit of the widow, with remainder to the children. The other half was left in equal shares to the son and two daughters, also in trust till each in turn reached the age of thirty-five.

Throwing down the paper, he smiled wearily. It seemed queer. Theo had come into his poor little life and wrecked it. His nest egg of eight hundred dollars, saved with so much self-denial, had vanished at her touch; she had made it impossible for him to get another job. Having done that, she had gone back to her rôle of fairy princess, and, in the most literal sense of the words, he was left to starve. Queer!

He had never thought she would do anything like that; but if she had not had it in her she would never have left him all this time without a sign that she had ever cared for him. She probably wanted a divorce. Well, let her take it. No divorce could part them further than they were already, he with his single dollar, she with her millions. For, millions or no millions, love or hate, he would never go back to her.

At the very same minute Theo was trying to force on Sheila a point of view which the girl rejected. As Spen was dining with the Allenbys, their own dinner had been brief. With arms about each other's waists they were enjoying the last flush of sunset as they sauntered up the long straight path which led through the garden. Not less gorgeous than the sunset were the dahlias, gladioli, and zinnias, in which the season was blazing to its end.

"You don't see a bit what I mean, darling," Theo was protesting. "It isn't that I want a divorce. If it comes to that I'd rather remain as I am—"

"Married to George, but not living with him?"

"You can't live with a man who sends you away. You seem to forget that."

"He wouldn't have sent you away if he could have kept you."

"He could have kept me because I would have stayed. Do you suppose I didn't want to stay? He said he couldn't bear to see me suffering privation, as if privation mattered when you love enough. What did I care about privation so long as I had him? But I couldn't make him see—"

She was unable to explain what she couldn't make him see because of the necessity of choking back her

tears. Sheila had therefore the opportunity to say what she had been trying to say for some time past.

"But if you love him the way you say you do—and I'm sure that he loves you—why can't you take your money and be happy together and sensible?"

"By sensible you mean the way it seems to you. But you don't remember what I owe to dear papa."

"You owe him the same as I do—"

"You didn't kill him. I did."

"But, Theo dear, you didn't."

"No one can judge of that but myself. There were no witnesses. I was alone with him. No opinion counts but my own."

"Well, even if you did kill him I don't see that that's a reason for making us all unhappier than we are, and yourself the unhappiest of all."

"You don't see because you're not in my position. You haven't the same burden on your conscience."

"But I should think you'd have a worse one if you do what you say now."

"You think that because you don't know. There couldn't be a worse one. What I have eating at my heart is so terrible that I'd give everything in the world to appease it."

"You'd give up George?"

"I'm not called on to give up George. I've no choice in the matter. I've told you already, and I tell you again, that George won't have me without money, and if I go to him I must leave the money behind me."

"But why must you leave the money behind you? That's what I don't see. Father hadn't signed that codicil—"

"He'd have signed it if I hadn't interfered before he had time to do it. It was lying on his desk. He

intended doing it before he left the office. I struck him down, the best father two girls ever had."

"Oh, no, he wasn't," Sheila declared, coolly. "He was a good father in his way, and in his way he was a cruel one. He was awful to me through the winter, and a great deal worse to you. What's the use of trying to make a saint of him just because he's dead? They did that at the funeral, and it—it disgusted me."

"I don't think that's a nice way to talk, Sheila dear. He's gone and can't defend himself—"

"Well, we couldn't defend ourselves when he was here. I'm willing to give him all the credit that belongs to him; but I'm not willing to tell lies. And for you to go and sacrifice yourself—and George—and all the rest of us—just because of a fancy that you've done him wrong—"

Theo seized on the point she could deal with most easily. "I shouldn't be sacrificing all of you, because Spen agrees with me."

"He agrees with you only for the reason that he thinks we'll cut a better figure as a family if we get rid of George. But he doesn't know anything about it. I could tell him things that would open his eyes, if he's not stone blind."

"What sort of things?"

"Things about Helen Allenby. But I can't speak of them. She made me promise not to."

"She doesn't care anything about him. I know that."

"She doesn't care anything about him—the way he goes on. If he wasn't so much of a snob she'd—she'd—but that's what I swore I wouldn't tell."

In silence they walked on to the end of the path and

turned. "Did you know," Sheila said then, "that George has left the bank? Spen told me so this morning."

Theo grasped her sister more tightly in order not to display too much emotion. "No. When? Why didn't Spen tell me?"

"He never came back after father's death. I don't know why Spen didn't tell you."

She remembered now his throwing it at her father that he was giving up the place, but in the crowding of the incidents that day she had forgotten it. In all her resentments and longings she had been thinking of him as safely settled at the Hudson River Trust by day, and in Butter Street by night. She knew, so to speak, where she could put her hand on him at any time. But now . . .

The possibilities frightened her. It was to herself more than to her sister that she said:

"He hadn't much money—not more than ten or twelve dollars. If he didn't get a job very soon—"

"He had forty-five a week, didn't he?"

Theo said that this was so.

"And do you know how much you and I will have a week, when father's estate is settled up?"

"I haven't thought anything about it."

"We shall have about three thousand apiece. I reckoned it up a few nights ago. Spen will have the same, and mother a great deal more. Isn't it queer? He gets forty-five for working hard; we three thousand for doing nothing. I suppose it must be all right; but it's queer, don't you think so?"

Theo said nothing. She said nothing because a big thought possessed her. It was too big to confide



to Sheila, too confused for her to have it clear as yet in her own mind. Could she work it out, the most aching part of her yearning over George would be in a measure stilled. But would they let her work it out?

## *Chapter XXVII*

HER appointment having been made by telephone, she was admitted to see Mr. Stone at once. He received her with affection. It was not the first time they had met since her father's death, but it was the first time they had met alone. Seated in an armchair close to his desk, she did her best to explain herself.

"It's about George."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"But don't you think you ought to know?"

"I thought I did. I hadn't heard till a few days ago that he wasn't here."

"Hasn't been here since your father died. Don't know anything about him. Asked that young fellow Maggs, who seemed to be his chum; but he's lost sight of him, too."

"I think I know where I could find him."

"Then, by golly! Theo, it's a pity you don't do it."

She moistened her parched lips. "It wasn't so much that I was thinking of finding him myself. I thought the—the trustees—you and Mr. Priest—might do it."

"Us? Why?"

It was a difficult tale to tell, and with all her bracing of herself, she told it nervously. "Did you know that dear papa came to see us—George and me—in our flat, one Sunday in the spring? Well, he did. He came to ask me to make a visit home, with a view to

my staying home for good. He said if I did stay for good—and if George would set me free again—he'd give him—two hundred thousand dollars."

"Oh, he did, did he? And what did you say?"

"*I* said"—she stressed the pronoun—"that I couldn't think of it. But George—"

"Yes, George? Go on, dear."

"George asked him to—to let the invitation stand open—so that we could think it over. Then—"

Once more he was obliged to encourage her. "Take your time, dear. Don't mind cryin' a bit between-whiles."

"Well, then—by degrees—George let me see that he thought we'd better accept papa's proposal. The night before papa died he made it so—so clear that I couldn't do anything but go. That was why I went to the bank to—to tell papa I was coming home. I didn't know that everything would be such a shock to him—"

"Of course you didn't, dear; but anything else—any little hitch in the bank's affairs—would have been just as fatal. When it was touch and go with him you happened to come in—and it was—go."

"But that's not what I came to talk about. What I want to know is this. George *has* set me free; so don't we owe him the money papa promised him?"

"Don't who owe him the money?"

"I suppose all of us—papa's estate."

He explained the impossibility of the trustees recognizing such a claim. The case being simple, she had no difficulty in understanding it.

"Well then," she urged, "couldn't the two hundred thousand be taken out of mine? I should be glad."

"Not as long as the estate is in trust. When it comes into your own hands you'll be free to do what you like with it."

"But that won't be till I'm thirty-five, not for eight or nine years, and it's now he wants the money." She burst out with all the emotion she was trying to subdue. "Oh, Mr. Stone, I'm frightfully afraid he hasn't even got a job. When he left the bank he had only ten or twelve dollars, and if it hadn't been for me—"

Leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees, he took her hand and patted it. "If it hadn't been for you, my dear, a good many things would not have happened that have happened. But, now that we've got them to face, isn't the way that gives the least pain in the future the best one to take? You're in love with George, aren't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"And George is in love with you, isn't he?"

"Yes, but we've got things so mixed up that love is not what counts."

"Then make it what counts, or you'll get into more trouble. You say you know where you can find him. Then find him. Tell him you're sorry for the misunderstanding."

"But there was no misunderstanding. It was perfectly plain. He wanted me to go—"

"Well, see if he doesn't want you to come back. If you know where he is, take a taxi and hurry there before he gets away."

Theo did not take a taxi and hurry there, because she already had another plan. Once more it was a plan that required meditation, but within a few days

she had the details to her mind. She would pay George the two hundred thousand to which he was entitled for giving her her liberty. But she could pay it only by installments. Ten thousand she could give him now, because in the interval before the final settling of the estate twenty-five thousand had been turned into her account. The rest could be paid quarterly or yearly or in any way that they chose. For before making a decision she and George must talk over the arrangement together.

On reaching this conclusion her heart leaped. She would never go back to him, but at least they would have one more talk. With one more talk it seemed to her possible to bear any separation afterward. The question was where they should have it.

Then it came to her that the simplest place was in the dear old flat in Butter Street. Since he had still a few weeks' lease of it, he would surely be living there. She didn't know when he would be at home; but she had her key; she could let herself in and wait for him. Just to wait there listening for the sound of his key in the lock, the tap of his stick, the shuffle of his lame foot . . . just to see him and come to a better understanding . . . just to see him free from the money cares that had always sapped his life . . . even if it were for the last time they should look each other in the eyes . . .

She chose a day when she had shopping to do in New York and she could tell the family that she might be late in coming home. The motor which took her in she left where she could find it again, and disappeared into the subway. The act seemed to make a change in her. It was as if she had a dual person-



ality, putting off one and taking on the other, according as she felt herself Jackson Blent's daughter or George Pevensey's wife. Lately she had been the former, accepting ease, service, luxury as the matter of course of life. Now with the first steps into the subway she was another creature. The darkness, the crowds, the promiscuity, the pushing, were part of an existence in which there was something dear.

Because it was the quiet time of day the car was relatively empty. Opposite her a loosely built Jewish woman was holding half a dozen parcels, and at the same time wiping the nose of a little Jewish boy. Beside her a neat little flapper was half lying in her young man's arms. Beside them again, a shabby old man had stowed a shabby old basket behind his feet, while he read a midday paper. A tired woman in mourning distributed pieces of candy to three little girls, likewise in mourning, scolding them in some foreign tongue. It was all strange, and yet familiar, sordid and yet like the lights of home to a homesick traveler. It was the road she had always taken when she knew she would meet George at the other end.

So in climbing the steps and coming out into the noisy paper-strewn street in Brooklyn. Having always hated it, she found herself now looking at the alien crowds and the unenticing little shops with something like affection. They belonged to that year in her life of which she had never before realized the happiness.

She turned into Butter Street, noting the changes which even a few weeks had brought about. Another old house was being torn down to make way for a tall thin structure of steel and cement. A thread-and-

needle shop had been opened in a basement. The big apartment house opposite their own, for which five dwellings had been sacrificed, was etched against the sky in a forest of uprights and crossbeams. She came to her own door.

Her courage began to fail her. George might be in. He might not be glad to see her. If he were not glad to see her, what should she do? She hoped he would not be there. Waiting would give her time to calm herself.

The stairs, as she mounted them, seemed more than ever to sag inward. One day, she felt, the building would collapse in the center. But George would be out of it by that time. With ten thousand dollars in his bank account, and the expectation of more, he would house himself more fittingly.

As, on her own landing, she fumbled in her bag for the key, she thought she heard sounds within the flat. That meant that George was at home. There being no help for it now, she inserted the key and turned it.

The door rolled open and she stepped inside. Her first sensation was of strangeness. It was the well-known flat, yet nothing looked the same. Where there had been a chair in the narrow hallway there was now a yellow-painted box she had never seen before. In the sitting room, of which she caught a glimpse, there was a bed. A broom leaned in a corner, where neither she nor George would have left one.

She stood as if paralyzed. The suspicion that she was in the wrong house she dismissed, since she knew she was in the right one. It was beginning to occur to her that George might be sharing the apartment

with a friend, when a little yellow-haired girl, perhaps five years old, appeared in the doorway of the sitting room. She remained but an instant, running away with a cry of "Ma! Ma-a-a! Some one's stealin' the broom."

Theo remained where she was, waiting on the heavy tread proceeding from the kitchen. The woman who then appeared was untidy, but motherly, not one to be afraid of.

"In the name o' God what's brought you here, and how did you get in?"

"I used to live here," Theo faltered. "I had the key. My name is Mrs. Pevensey."

"So it might be. I can't say contrairy because I don't know. But it's a quare thing to walk off with the key of a flat you don't live in no longer, and be st'alin' in on people and puttin' their hearts in their mouth."

"I thought my husband would be here. I've been away. I didn't know he'd given up the apartment."

"And all I know is that I've been here since the seventeenth, and got me lease signed reg'lar."

"Then do you know where my husband, Mr. Pevensey, has gone?"

The woman shook her head. "I niver hear that name at all, at all. But I did hear say—it was one of the men that comes round the house—the iceman or the fishman or the laundryman—I forget—what told me—that the fella what lived here was sick or dead or in jail or somethin', and couldn't pay his rint. That's all I can tell you. And now if you're goin', perhaps you'd l'ave me the key and not be frightenin' me again."

Thanking her feebly, Theo turned away. Out in the street the sweet light of glamour had departed, leaving only the ugly reality. She walked blindly. She seemed to be going nowhere, to have nowhere in the world to go.

## *Chapter XXVIII*

ON dragging himself back to Butter Street on the night when he had read of the filing of Jackson Blent's will George Pevensey found a letter in his box. His first thought, that it might be from Theo, hardly became a disappointment when he read the address in the upper left-hand corner: Pemberton Heights National Bank, Pemberton Heights, N. J. On scanning the contents beneath the hall lamp he trembled from excitement as well as from exhaustion.

MR. GEORGE W. PEVENSEY,  
DEAR SIR:

You will remember that some months ago you made an application here for the position of paying teller in the above bank. No such position was available, nor is there now. On the other hand, one of our receiving tellers is leaving us for a position in the West. Should this opening appeal to you, I should be glad to talk the matter over any time within the next few days.

Yours truly,  
NATHANIEL GORT.

He could hardly take it in. Had a great joy been any longer possible, this would have been a great joy. As it was, he found it a kind of blessedness. The relief, the comfort, the renewing of his self-respect, made blessedness the only word. Somewhere in his past there had been thanksgivings to Unseen Powers that protected him, but during the war he had ceased to make them. The Powers which protected him and



did not protect other men confused his sense of justice. But now, sitting by himself in the dark, with this incredible good news, gratitude rose like an incoming tide which nothing could repress. He had felt so deserted, so lonely, so useless in the world! when all the while there had been this almost unknown kindly man waiting for the first chance to serve him. It recalled what in his early days used to be told him about God.

Much of that night he spent brushing, sponging, pressing, polishing, in order to disguise the wear and tear which makes anyone look abject. Luckily, he had still a few cents with which to pay his way across the river. The bank he had last seen with shavings on the floor, and pens no more than in outline, was now a busy little center of entries and exits stamped with the preoccupation which goes with financial affairs. Some ten minutes after sending in his name a stout young office girl led him to Mr. Gort.

His reception was friendly and undemonstrative. Mr. Gort was quiet in manner, and used no more words than those essential to his thought. He said he had kept George in mind because of his perseverance, having generally noticed that eagerness to get a place meant eagerness in work. Mr. Gully being of much the same opinion, they had decided to offer him the job, and to hold it open for a week at least, to give him time for a reply. The salary would be fifty a week, and work could begin at once.

"Mr. Gully's friend at the Hudson River Trust told us some time ago that you've been six years with them and have given satisfaction. I suppose you're still of a mind to leave them?"

George explained his position. He had left on the

day when the former president had died. His leaving, however, had had nothing to do with the death, since he had given his notice before that event.

"What have you been doing since?"

George smiled faintly. "Been looking for a job."

"Dreary work, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, rather. But I hope it's all over now."

"You're a married man, aren't you? You married Jackson Blent's daughter."

Relieved that the fact was already known and that he had been offered the place in spite of it, George enlarged on his usual answer.

"Yes, sir; but we'd already separated before her father died. I believe she means to divorce me."

"On grounds of unfaithfulness?"

"No, sir; I hardly know on what grounds. But they'll find something."

"And you'll not defend it?"

"No, sir; I won't defend it."

His confession being made, he waited in some trepidation for a verdict. He noticed that the face which had already struck him as grave and sympathetic was delicate in feature and fastidious in expression. A slender, well-formed hand played with a paper-knife before a word was spoken.

"I had some dealings with Jackson Blent a few years ago. He struck me as a hard man, aggressive, and"—he seemed to seek for a word—"and underbred."

Having no response to this and feeling that he had already taken too much of his patron's time, George rose, with such awkward expressions of thanks as he could command. He was halfway to the door when the new friend spoke again:

"You won't get any money till Saturday of next week. How are you fixed till then?"

The question was the one which George was asking himself. What could he do to supplement his dollar, so as to live for another ten days? His furniture, if sent to an auctioneer, might bring him in twenty—he couldn't expect more at public sale—but even that might not be paid him for three weeks. The actual minute was the one in which his needs were pressing.

Nevertheless, he could frame no answer to the question put to him. Trying to say that he thought he could "get along," he found his slow speech slower. The best he could do was to stammer incoherently and turn red. It was a red that burned on his cheeks, flushed his blond forehead, and put shame into his somber eyes.

"How would a hundred dollars do you? You could pay me back by degrees."

While the check was being scribbled George felt the smarting of tears. Too emotional to say as much as thank you, he took it with more stammering.

The quiet man dismissed him with a quiet smile. "Was in your fix once. After the panic of 1893. Couldn't get a job anywhere. Friends all gave me the cold shoulder. Man I hardly knew helped me out at last. Never forgotten him. Well, be off now and do what you've got to. See you here in the morning."

With a hundred dollars in his pocket George arranged with his landlord to take the flat off his hands, with the auctioneer to sell his furniture, and with each of his creditors for an extension of time in return for so much on account. He then moved to Pemberton Heights, settling himself in a boarding

house and hoping to begin life again with the Blent episode behind him.

And because he hoped to begin life again with the Blent episode behind him Theo reverted to her sense of injury. That is, she drew the conclusion that since he had disappeared he had certainly wanted to be rid of her. There were times when she doubted this, times when she thought it incredible. Now there could be no further question on the subject. Having gone without a trace, it was plain that he didn't wish to leave a trace by which she could ever find him.

The fact that he must know that she was now her own mistress to go to him if so inclined only made his desertion the more intentional. When you added the other fact that of the greatness of her inheritance he was probably as well informed as she, you got an element of contemptuousness. There was a time when he had said that without money he wouldn't take her back, but now he wouldn't do it even with the money. The woman in Butter Street had said that he was sick or dead or in jail; and if he was alive he was surely more or less in want. He was in want while she had all that money; and yet he would not stretch out a hand to her. For his own sake, she began to think, rather than for that of carrying out her father's wishes, she ought to set him free.

She broached this to Mr. Stone as soon as she had worked out another of her plans of action.

"Mr. Stone, how do people get divorces?"

Tilting back in his office chair, he put his cigar between his lips and took it out again. "Do you mean how would you set to work to divorce George?"

With some confusion she replied that it was what she did mean.

"Well, first you'd have to have your grounds."

They discussed the question of grounds, Stone explaining that hers were very weak ones, though the lawyers might twist something out of them if he put up no fight.

"It doesn't look as if he would."

"Would you like him to?"

"I don't like anything about it. It's not because I like it that I'm undertaking it. If it wasn't for a sense of duty—"

"Duty towards—who?"

"Towards darling papa first of all. I know what he wanted me to do—"

"Yes, I've heard all about that. Your mother and Spen and Sheila have all talked to me about it. Been waitin' for you to bring it up, too, and now I'm glad you've done it." Tipping forward from his tilted position, he put his elbows on the desk, to gaze at her straight in the eyes. "Look-a-here, Theo, my girl! God Almighty saved your poor father from committin' an act that in some ways'd ha' been worse than a crime by takin' him to Himself. And here you'd butt in and force it on the poor departed soul in spite o' the Lord's mercy. If he'd signed that codikle and had it witnessed it'd ha' been as wicked a thing as I've ever heard of a man doin' to his child. But I know, and you know, and we all know, that he didn't know what he was about. For a lot of reasons—his disease, and his tempers, and his worry about you—he'd got off the hooks. And, by golly! I never knew a man so spared by a merciful Father as he was that morning he was took."

Theo stared with wide, blazing, fascinated eyes. "Is that the word you have for it—spared?"



"Sure it's the word I have for it. Let me tell you this. I wouldn't ha' let him sign that codikle. But if he'd signed it I'd ha' held up every man in the shop before I'd ha' allowed one of them to witness it. But if they'd witnessed it, I'd 'a' torn the thing to shreds."

"But if you couldn't get it into your possession?"

"Then we'd be havin' a great big scandal now. We'd have had to call in the law. All the newspapers, that have sure talked enough about you in the last twelve months, would be bandying it about that your father tried to cut you off. And, after all, the law wouldn't have allowed the codikle to go through. It's been tried before in half a dozen ways, and it's always been turned down. I've had legal advice on it. Contrary to public welfare is what they call it, to separate husband and wife." He shifted his position and took another tone. "Be clear in your mind, me girl, as to what it is you want to do. Your father was saved from making a mistake, and you'd still try to have him make it. The law forbids certain things to be done, and you'd go to work and do them. It's not worthy of you, dear."

"And yet it's what darling papa was trying to get me to do."

"Yes, but don't you believe that in whatever place he's gone to he thinks more sensible than he did when he was here? I don't know much about what happens to people when they die, but that's what I've always understood."

"Then do you think he'd want me to take his money and go and live with George?"

"I don't know what he'd want you to do. All I'm sayin' is that if he's moved farther on, as we think

he has, he must have more common sense than he had in this life. When he was saved from a great mistake he wouldn't like to see you rushin' in and makin' it, just to finish the work he should never have begun. You're a fine girl, Theo. You've shown your mettle in the year you've been married. As I understand it, it was pretty tough."

"It was very happy—till papa came with his proposal."

"All the same, you were lonely, and cut away from your own kind of people, and had to swing a new kind of life. You did it. You did it fine. Splendid experience for you. Help you to do bigger things still. But there's one thing about you, Theo, that'll always queer you, as long as you don't get over it."

He knew from her face that she was asking him what it was.

"You're too cocksure; and when you're cocksure you're too much in a hurry. Things that might be all right for you to do the day after to-morrow you dash in and do to-day. That's the way you married George. If you'd only waited—"

Though she interrupted him, it was humbly. "I know that, Mr. Stone. I'm going to try to be more careful. When I think a thing I always feel sure I must be right, when, as it turns out, I'm generally wrong. But I mean to do differently; I really do. Only just for now—"

"Only just for now you want to go on in the same old way. Is that it?"

"No, not exactly. When I spoke of getting a divorce it was—it was chiefly for George's sake. I'm willing to give up what I said I'd do about dear papa's wishes—but it isn't right for me to ignore the

fact that George"—she whipped herself into saying it—"that George would like to be rid of me."

"What makes you think so?"

She told the full story of her wrongs. Not only had he sent her away in her father's lifetime, but since her father's death he had not once expressed a hint of sympathy or of caring what had become of her. And then he had disappeared. Her discovery of this, with the attempt to pay him the two hundred thousand she considered due to him, she confessed frankly. Had he felt any need of her he would have contrived to let her know that he was leaving the nest where their life together had been spent. He would not have gone out into the dark without telling her where she could find him.

"As it is, I have no idea. It's killing me. I think of nothing else. I don't mean to go back to him, but not to know where he is—"

She was pressing her handkerchief to her lips when he tossed off, casually, "I can tell you."

"You?"

"Sure. Young Maggs told me; Scott, our cashier, told him; and Gully, the cashier of a little bank over at Pemberton Heights in New Jersey, told Scott. George is over there, receivin' teller in the Pemberton Heights National Bank, and doin' fine. Raked in a lot of new depositors already. Gully thinks he's got the stuff in him that makes a banker."

So it had happened, after all. The example of Henry Pomeroy Davison had been fulfilled. The "big thing" for which she had been so impatient was perhaps on the way; and she had not given it time. With a kind of shame and a kind of exultation, she was back in the night when she had read to him passages

from *Men Who Are Making America*, and the partnership with Mr. Morgan had been dreamed of. It was so far away now, so far away and so sweet!

But even here there was something to make her feel more bitterly. Of the Pemberton Heights undertaking she was a part. She had been at its inception. Unknown to him, she had wept when it seemed to have failed. But now that it had succeeded, she had a right to be informed. Since he had not informed her, the proof that he had shut her out of his life stared her in the face. She said so now, with some tragic exaggeration.

He looked at her with a queer little screwed-up expression of the eyes. "Why didn't you ask him to the funeral?"

The question took her so much by surprise that she only faltered in reply: "We thought of it—"

"But turned him down. He was your husband, your father's son-in-law, one of the nearest relations. You beat the woods to find other people, and dug out Stephen Blent whom none o' you had seen twice in your lives. And yet you wouldn't have George Pevensey. It wasn't just Spen and your mother that wouldn't have him; it was you. Spen's told me all about it. He left it with you, and you put him out of the family."

"It wasn't quite like that," Theo protested, faintly.

"It was near enough like that for a man to feel that his wife had given him a nasty one. No one finds it easy to forgive—"

"Oh, if it comes to forgiveness—" Theo was beginning in her own defense.

"Well, hasn't it come to forgiveness?" Getting to his feet and striding about the room, he put his

cigar nervously in his mouth, only to pull it nervously out again. "Look-a-here, me dear! Of all the foolish things that'll come between man and wife, nothin' is so infernal foolish as for each to be chewin' over the faults and failings of the other, and makin' their plans as to how they'll pay 'em off. If you've got a grievance against him go and talk it over. If you won't talk it over, put it out of your mind and forget it."

"I couldn't talk it over when I didn't know where he was."

"Well now, I'll make you an offer. I'll take you to see him. We'll go to Pemberton Heights—"

But here she was firm. "No. He sent me away. If he ever wants me back he'll come and fetch me."

"Well then. I'll bring him to see you."

Her agitation could only be read in the way she twisted and untwisted her fingers. "I don't believe he'd come."

"We'll see. I'll take him down to Blentwood some Sunday. It'll have to be a Sunday, because it's the only day he'd be free."

And yet it was in George that the family friend found the material stubborn.

"She thinks I haven't got the spirit of a man. She'll think it less if I go fawning to her, now that she's got money."

"If you'd put the money out of your mind—"

"I can't put it out of my mind, because it's always been the key to the whole business. I've never in my life heard so much talk of money, or of the want of money, as I have since I married Theo." His excitement was such that words came easily. "Money is like the rocky substratum of the earth. Where the



soil is deep it's kept out of sight. But every here and there it's right on the surface, where it hurts your feet. When you run across a Blent a bare crude rock is sticking out, and you can't get away from it."

Wally Stone looked at the young man with an attention such as he had never given him before. As a matter of fact, he didn't know him. He had seen him for the past six years as one of the employees of the bank, with all of whom he liked to be on the jovial terms of a good-natured superior; but not till he had eloped with Jackson Blent's daughter had he ever thought of him twice. Even then he could give him no special inspection since Blent and Spen were always on the spot, and the distance between himself and the bookkeepers was a consideration. All that had given him a respect for George was what he heard in the bank, and what he had been told, largely by Jackson Blent himself in his hero-hunting days, of his conduct in the war. A steady, sterling character meant everything to Wally Stone—and then he liked his looks.

Nor did he wholly dislike his hesitation as to going down to Blentwood. Having asked him to run over to his house in Park Avenue on this Sunday afternoon, he had expected to find a young man who would soon surrender to the flag of three million dollars. But the three million dollars seemed to form another obstacle. Not that the fellow pretended to the pose of being shy of a rich wife. He was only shy, now that she had plenty, of the woman who had despised him when she had had nothing. Since he had escaped, he was slow to put himself a second time into danger.

"And besides"—he blushed as he gave this added

explanation—"I've now got the chance to do something. It's a small chance, but I can swing that better than a big one. I don't believe I'm going to stay where I am as I stayed where I was at the Hudson River Trust. I've got a hunch that what's in me is going to get out; and I want to do it on my own, not on money that's come down from Jackson Blent."

Stone commended this, but went on to say: "All the same, if you were to go down with me next Sunday—"

"I went down to Blentwood once, sir. I shan't forget it. It left me with no desire to go a second time."

"Not even to save the girl you love—and have married—from unhappiness?"

He reflected long. "That would be an inducement, sir, if I could be sure that I was doing it."

"Can't you be sure if I tell you?"

There was further long reflection. "You see, sir," he began then, "Theo dropped me—she dropped me hard. It was all the harder because of what she was and what I was. If my position had been different I might have forced myself upon her. But I couldn't. It was for her to make the first sign if she wanted me to make a second. When she didn't—"

Stone rose and passed his arm across the young man's shoulder. "Come down with me to Blentwood next Sunday afternoon."

George stumbled to his feet. "No sir, not next Sunday."

"Then the Sunday after."

The young man shook his head. "I—I don't know. I'm not sure that I could—ever."

"Oh, ever's a long time. You will in the end."

"Then if I do there'll be trouble. I told them once that I'd make them listen to me some day, and if I go they'll have to."

"Very well, George. I'll get them together, so that you can have your audience."

## *Chapter XXIX*

BECAUSE Theo was so unhappy she was blind to the small things taking place around her. Goings and comings which she saw with her eyes had for her no significance. That Spen and Sheila, that Sheila and her mother, that her mother and Spen, had whisperings together, sometimes with glances toward herself, she noticed without heeding. That her mother and Paget Allenby held earnest consultations she also observed, but inattentively. That toward twilight of an autumn afternoon she saw Wally Stone drive out through the gateway of Allenby Manor did strike her as odd; but two minutes afterward her mind was turning helplessly round and round the fact that all these Sundays had passed and George had not come.

Mr. Stone must have seen him and he must have refused. It was what she might have expected. It threw her back more stiffly on the attitude she meant to take if he ever came. She would forgive, but she would forgive with dignity. Generous, she would not be so generous as to overlook the fact that her love, which had no limits, had been sinned against.

So much she would have to make clear, but, once it was done, her love would pour itself over him like the sea through broken dikes. There would never have been such happiness as that which she would bless him with. The first use which she conceived of for her money was in giving him all he had had to do without, and giving it to him lavishly. They would

probably go abroad for a few years, and by the time they returned gossip would have simmered down. But first he must come, and he seemed to despise coming.

Then early on a Sunday morning, late in October, Wally Stone called up to say that he and George would arrive at Blentwood in the course of the forenoon. She received this message as she breakfasted with Sheila in the upstairs sitting room they shared. Her sister, therefore, knew that George would appear; but Theo would tell neither Spen nor her mother nor Aunt Katty. She would see what reception they gave him when he took them by surprise. Beyond the fact that Mr. Stone was coming on business of importance she said nothing.

But the thought of seeing George again thrilled her with the electricity of new life. After her weeks of depression she swung back to sudden energy. Unless he were penitent he would not be coming; and, once he was penitent, the flood-gates of her pardon would be opened up to overwhelm him with her forgiveness.

As to the family, she knew they meant to receive him. It was the induction drawn subconsciously from the whisperings around her. With Spen it was a matter of his getting Helen Allenby. Helen would not marry him so long as he kept up his opposition. It was not that she cared about George, whom she didn't know; but she cared about Theo, whom she did know and she cared especially about social simplicity and common sense. Moreover, there were qualities in Spen which attracted her. He was good-looking in his way, not less kindly than most men, and as fond of outdoor sports as she was herself.



If he was not her ideal she probably remembered that the years were passing and her ideal had not come her way. Her father, for all sorts of subtle reasons, had always liked the Blents, and not the less for having money.

But of these facts the influence was only indirect. Freed from that obsession of carrying out Jackson Blent's wishes due to the exaltation of her first few days of grief, Theo knew herself now as independent. She would use her independence. Neither Spen nor anyone else would keep her from George, or George from her. She had tried living with him and had tried living without him, and knew what came within her powers. When George left she would go away with him. She cared less about what she might be going to than for the fact that it would be with him. All her self-tortures and vows of self-immolation, all her scruples and fears and introspections, had distilled but this simple intention. But they had redistilled it, and redistilled it again, till the cup held nothing but this single golden drop. Not since the days before she had gone away and married had she felt such self-possession as that with which she entered the living room that morning.

There was no one there but Sheila, who, having cut the last of the chrysanthemums, was distributing them in the vases. "You've made up your mind, haven't you, Theo?"

Theo admitted that she had.

"Then I wish you'd tell me what you've decided on."

"I can't do that, not till I tell the whole family—and him."

"But you've given up trying to carry out what father was writing in the codicil?"

Theo came to help with the burnished and crimson flowers. "It isn't that exactly. I've only come to feel that he's gone where he sees more clearly."

"And when people go where they see more clearly they always see the way we do, don't they?"

"It's not that they see the way we do so much as that they see rightly."

"And poor father was all mixed up. I didn't think he saw rightly at all. Did you?"

Theo felt obliged to steer carefully. "He saw rightly from his own point of view. He was the best father children ever had. You must always feel that, Sheila dear."

"I don't think he was the best father children ever had," Sheila said, with her customary bluntness. "But I'll try to say so, if that's the right thing to do."

Theo held out a long-stemmed chrysanthemum of saffron and wine-colored petals the better to enjoy its splendor. "Well, anyhow, now that he's left us, the least we can do is to carry out his wishes in the new light he's gone on to."

"And will his wishes in the new light he's gone on to decide you to take your money and go back to George in the way you said you wouldn't do?"

"I've tried to make you understand that that's what I can't tell you, not till I tell everyone."

"But you're going somewhere. You've packed a suitcase. And you've laid out the hat and coat that go with the dress you're wearing. I saw them on your bed."

A noise at the door saved Theo by creating a distraction. Aunt Katty, in white with black ribbons

fluttering about her, appeared in the doorway, Hannah supporting her.

"You fool! It'll be your fault if I'm late for the whole show."

Hannah apologized while helping her down the steps. "I'd 'a' been earlier, miss, only your woman told me as you wasn't dressed."

"Dressed? What's it to you whether I'm dressed or not? Wouldn't miss what's going on here to-day, not if I had to come naked." Leaning on her stick, she eyed the girls with her wicked stare. "Hello, you two! What's in the wind? Don't tell me you've nothing up your sleeve, because I smell it."

With a cracked laugh she tottered to her chair, into which she sank, mumbling incoherently. While Sheila went on with her task Theo waited till Hannah had settled Aunt Katty, with the Sunday paper across her knees.

"When Mr. Stone comes, Hannah, show him in here, and—and anyone who may be with him."

"Very good, Miss Theo."

"And tell Tremlett to keep a car at the door in case it should be needed."

"Very good, Miss Theo. Thank you, Miss Theo."

"Oh, and, Hannah! Go and look for mother and Mr. Spen and ask them to be here in good time." She continued to Sheila, as Hannah went his way: "I hate to have people straggling in, making you say over again things that are hard enough to say at all."

Aunt Katty came out of a trance. "And if that young man that's given you the go-by won't come back to you, Theo, remember you'll get over it. You'll think you won't, but you will. Man turned me down

once; thought it'd kill me; but now I never think of him, not once in twenty years."

Sheila said, irreverently: "We've heard that tale a thousand times, Aunt Katty."

"And you'll hear it a thousand times more, if you live as long as I do. Turned me down, the brute. Married another girl. Glad he did. Might have had three brats like you to worry me. Now I've got all my money for myself and can worry other people."

As she screamed out her cockatoo laugh Spen, the embodiment of correct mourning for a young man in the country, came through an open French window, smoking a cigarette. To his white flannels sorrow gave the touches of a black tie, black watch chain, with black links in the cuffs of a white shirt sporting a smart black stripe. A black band went round his rakish gray hat, and another round his coat sleeve.

"Say, Theo, what's the racket? What do you want us all on deck for?"

She spoke with dignity. "You'll see in a little while, Spen."

"Oh, hang a little while! I don't want to loaf round here all day. Seems to me as if some of us ought to go to church, so soon after father's death. Look well. Show respect to his memory."

"I don't see," Sheila objected, "how it would show respect to his memory when he never went himself."

"No, but he sent many a whacking good check to take his place. Thought there were people who needed the church, father did. If you talk facts, so do I."

Theo intervened, pleadingly. "Well, it's too late to go now, and, anyhow, Spen, I wish you'd stay. Mr. Stone is coming specially, and I may never trouble you again."

"Oh, Lord! What's coming now?" Spen uttered a mock groan. "If you're never going to trouble us again, there's sure to be something brewing."

"Never troubled me," came from Aunt Katty. "Just put her down as a fool and let it go at that."

"We haven't all got your independence, Aunt Katty."

"Because you haven't got my money. Wouldn't stand me a minute if you didn't hope I'd leave you some of it."

Down the steps Mrs. Blent bustled briskly. In spite of her widow's dress, with white cuffs and bands in the English style, she looked years younger than when her husband was alive. The weight of fear being lifted, she was free to be the mother of her family and mistress of herself. In her tone there was an authority her children could not remember to have heard till within the last few weeks.

"I do think it's very unappetizing the way you all squabble. Spen, can't you leave your Aunt Katty alone? Sheila, please take away that basket. You do clutter up so. I should think, Theo, you'd see there was more decency in the place, with Mr. Stone coming, too."

"He isn't here yet," Aunt Katty said, grimly. "We don't have to look glum till we see the hearse. Poor Jackson Blent! No one but Wally Stone to be sorry that he's gone."

Forgetting that she had once thought of putting arsenic in her husband's tea, Mrs. Blent cried, reproachfully, "Aunt Katty, how *can* you?"

"I can the way you can, Augusta. Never saw a woman so changed in my life as you since the funeral. Got the pep of a bottle of champagne."



From the back of the room Sheila whispered to Theo, "I hear a car."

Aunt Katty still kept it up with her niece. "If you perk up like that when I go to my heavenly rest—"

"You'll hang on to spite us," Spen threw in. "We know that, Aunt Katty—"

"Oh, hush, the two of you!" Mrs. Blent implored. "Here's Mr. Stone."

### *Chapter XXX*

A MOVEMENT of welcome drew all except Aunt Katty to their feet, facing the steps by which the friend of the family would come down. Hannah, appearing in the doorway, stepped aside to let the visitor pass into the room. George Pevensey loomed behind him.

Spen turned to Theo. "So that's the idea! Got to give him the glad hand."

Theo said nothing. She scarcely heard. In as far as her mind could register thought, it was to the effect that in the weeks of their separation George had grown older. He had grown thinner, too, and somber with a gravity which left no place for the sunniness she had loved. There was no sun in his expression now, nothing but the sullen bewilderment of a bull on entering the bull ring.

While Mr. Stone noisily made his greetings she went to George, who had limped down the steps, holding out both hands. Without drawing back from her, he stood rock-like and unapproachable.

"We'd better not shake hands, Theo, till I know why I've been brought here."

"I can tell you that in a word, George. It's because—"

But Mrs. Blent was also coming with proffered hand, and he did not mean to take it. In order not to seem rude he skirted away, as if without seeing her, finding shelter behind the library table spread

with papers and magazines. Here, as a year ago, he intrenched himself, to learn the reason of his errand. All he knew as yet was that he had not come by any impulse of his own. Wally Stone, supplemented by Paget Allenby, who frankly confessed that he intervened on grounds of friendship which might become those of relationship, had urged him till he was ashamed. He had come in fear, partly of the Blent family, partly of Theo herself. On the part of the Blent family he feared the open rejection of the last time; on the part of Theo he feared her presence. If she came to him too persuasively he might not be able to hold his ground.

Having released Mrs. Blent, Wally Stone made the circuit of the room with genial salutations. "Hello, Sheila, me girl! Look pretty, don't you? And you too, Spen. Glad to see you all bearin' up so well against your great sorrow. Well, if it ain't Miss Katty lookin' younger and prettier than any of the bunch."

With the exception of Theo, all dropped into seats, making an irregular circle about their guest. Spen brought cigars and cigarettes. Mrs. Blent purred amiably. Theo, her back to the table which formed George's barricade, stood like a sentinel, ready to defend him.

"Do tell us about dear Emily and the children, Mr. Stone," came sweetly from Mrs. Blent. "How are they since the measles?"

The timbre of Theo's voice was that of command rather than of petition. "Mother, do you mind if we go straight to the business for which Mr. Stone has come down?"

"Well, dear, if you're in such a hurry—"

"I *am* in a hurry, because I want Mr. Stone to tell you that he doesn't think I'm bound by father's codicil."

"Darling," the mother exclaimed, tearily, "as far as that goes we're all delighted that you feel so."

"Only that it doesn't go all the way, and you may not like the rest so well. Now that I can keep my money and still feel my conscience clear, I'm going back to my husband."

With a great effort Mrs. Blent replied, as instructed by Paget Allenby, "I'm perfectly reconciled—"

"Me too," Spen tossed into the offering of assent, doing it in the unemotional tone of a man acknowledging his presence at a meeting.

"That's fine," was Wally Stone's benediction.

"It don't matter," Aunt Katty croaked, in one of her lapses into semi-imbecility.

"George," Theo went on, turning to the man behind the barricade, "I want to say out before everyone that I'm going back to you because I love you. And because I love you I forgive you. I forgive you freely, and for all you did to hurt me. When you sent me away I felt bitterly at first, and said to the family that nothing would ever induce me to go back to you again; but now—now I want to do it."

George's manner had the force of self-restraint. "Wait a minute, Theo. I've got something to say."

Sheila's young voice rang like a silver trumpet. "Good for you, George! Speak out."

"I'll try to. I'm speaking to you, Theo, first of all, and yet I'm speaking to everyone."

"Very well, George," Theo answered, meekly. "I'm sure we're anxious to hear you."

Stammering, but finding the right words, he had

the self-command which always came to him at moments of intensity.

"You see, I've got things to forgive on my side, and I'm not sure that I forgive them. When I remember how you spoke of me when I was last in this room—"

Spен challenged him. "We didn't say anything that wasn't true."

"I too hope to say nothing that isn't true, but I'm going to speak as frankly about you as you've spoken about me."

"You spoke pretty frankly about them," Aunt Katty screeched, "when you called 'em a family of cads. Theo told us that."

The reminder disconcerted him. "I'll explain what I meant by that," he said, with some embarrassment. "Because you were strong and I was weak you used your strength as only cads ever use it. When I say you I mean chiefly Mr. Jackson Blent; but at that time, at any rate, you all backed him up."

"See here," Spен said, haughtily, "if we're going to keep the peace—"

"But perhaps we're not going to. When Theo's heard my terms—"

Spен laughed mirthlessly. "Oh, your terms! So you're going to lay down terms."

"Yes, Mr. Blent, I'm going to lay down terms. I suppose it seems strange to you that a fellow like me should have rights and feelings and a will of his own, just like yourself. A year ago, when you flayed the flesh off me as if I didn't have a nerve, I'm sure it never occurred to you that a bookkeeper could feel an insult."

Aunt Katty commented, as if to herself, "Knows how to swing English."



"And except for keeping accounts it's almost the only thing I do know. I never had a chance to learn anything because I was caught in the machine. It was only because my father was a professor of English that he taught me to speak fairly well, and I often wish he hadn't."

Sheila, who was seated on one of the steps, called out in her silvery, ringing voice, "For mercy's sake why?"

"Because it queers me when I try to get a job. We Americans hate good English, and I've never found a use for it till now. Now, if I couldn't say the things I have on my mind . . ." He broke off to turn to his wife. "What hurts me most is that you, Theo, shouldn't have understood me. Because I was letting you go for your sake you thought I was doing it for my own. You'd got caught in the trap you made for yourself—and you did make it, Theo—"

"I know I did, George," she admitted.

"And when I tried to let you out of it you joined the rest of the family in hounding me. Do you suppose it didn't break my heart to see you go away and not be able to do anything to keep you? I wonder if you can begin to imagine what it must mean to anyone calling himself a man—"

Spem's interruption took the form of a loud aside, "But I thought that was the question."

George looked at him long, as if to fathom the meaning of these words, but spoke with moderation. "You thought it was a question as to whether or not I had the right to call myself a man. I understand that point of view. Big employers speak of us as hands, as if all the humanity we had was in our hands and ended there. Your father defined us as raw

material fed to the big machine. He compared us to oxen, whipped to the job every morning and whipped home again." He drew a long breath. "I dare say we are like that—"

"But he said you needn't be," Theo reminded him, a dusky red mounting to her cheeks, "if oxen would only organize."

George smiled. "He didn't put it quite like that. He said they never do—and they don't."

"Yes, but why not?"

The soft slow speech grew mild and bantering. "I don't know why not. But I do know that you wouldn't like it if they did. Think of what it would mean if you were to go downtown some morning, and there was no salesman in any shop, no clerk in any office, no teller in any bank, no stenographer in any office, no reporter on any newspaper, no teacher in any school—why, your strikes with labor would be child's play compared to such a tie-up."

Theo still felt her heart on fire. "Then why don't you do it?"

"I tell you I don't know. We could if we liked—but we don't like."

"Haven't got the ginger," Spen said, with a sneer he tried to turn off with a laugh.

"Perhaps that's it. We haven't got the ginger. In an age when everyone is fighting for his own hand and nothing else, we're an anomaly. We're always fighting for some one else's hand, and that, I suppose, is why we get no respect. I fought for your hand, Mr. Blent, while I was in the Hudson River Trust; now I'm fighting for another bank's."

"Oh, George," Sheila cried, "have you got a job?"

"Yes, and one that pays me better."

"How much better?"

"I was getting forty-five a week; now I'm getting fifty."

"Oh, is that all?"

He smiled again. "Five dollars isn't much to you; but it means a lot to me. It takes care of all my car fares. That's a big consideration for a man in my position."

Car fares taking Theo back to the days when she had often walked for the sake of the little economy, she cried now, "Oh, George, why do you talk like that when I'm going to have all my money?"

The sordidness of this conversation getting on his nerves, Spen jumped to his feet. "Oh, hang! I vote we stop rowing." Crossing the floor, he stretched his arm over the barricade. "If you want it, here's my hand."

George limped round the table. "If you'd said that a year ago everything might have been different. Now it may be too late."

While Spen's hand came down Theo uttered a little cry. "Oh, George, what do you mean by that?"

"Why should I want to come into this family?" He allowed that to sink in before going on. "You probably don't understand, any of you, how you've scourged me. You've scourged me, not because I was George Pevensey, an individual—I could have stood that better—but because I was a clerk. Because I was a clerk you used all the words in your dictionary to make me seem contemptible. I was a penguin, an ox, a bit of stuff. I wasn't a man. I couldn't afford to be a man. To claim to be a man would have been as much as my place was worth. And if I were to come into this family I don't believe it would be a month,

perhaps it wouldn't be a week, before you'd begin scourging me again."

"If it comes to scourging," Aunt Katty observed, dryly, "you're pretty good at it yourself."

"Can't any of you see that I've got it in me to feel shame? And you can't feel shame without being capable of pride."

Spen, who was again seated with a cigarette between his fingers, gave vent to his caustic cackle. "Oh, your pride. You make me laugh."

George continued to speak with the slow soft drawl which gave to his utterance a velvety moderation. "Yes, Mr. Blent, my pride. I know that to you that seems funny, because, as you reckon pride, it's a matter of dollars and cents. You have as much of it as you can pay for. With us who can pay for so little, pride is our best working asset. It's what keeps us plucky, thrifty, honest, and good-humored. It's what helps us to bear our restrictions, which are pretty tight ones, with little or no complaint, while we give less trouble than any other class to the whole community. People more lucky than ourselves can feel that their pride is in their check-books. Ours can only be in decency, and a great big sense of responsibility toward the work we have to do."

Spen was content to shrug his shoulders and say, "Bunk."

"Yes, that's the way many people feel. Any bit of self-respect that we lay claim to is bunk. I'm only telling you in the hope that you'll understand that we have our point of view as well as you; but so long as you won't understand it . . ." With a despairing gesture he turned from Spen toward Theo. "Now comes the hard part of what I have to do. I said I

would lay down my terms, and here's the first of them. If you want me, Theo, you must come after me."

"Very well, George. I'll *go* after you."

"And the second of my terms is this—you mustn't bring any money."

The silence which followed this statement was broken only when Mrs. Blent said in a puzzled tone, "What is he saying?"

To this there was no answer till Theo's deep contralto ventured, quietly, "Do you mean that we should go back and live as we lived in Butter Street?"

"Not exactly. Where I'm working now life is easier. It's pleasanter, too, and cheaper. We could probably have a little house, with a bit of lawn around it."

"But which we should keep up on your salary?"

He nodded.

"So that I should have to work as I worked last year?"

"The same kind of work, but not quite so hard."

"And use none of my money for anything."

He shook his head.

It was the critical moment. Even Aunt Katty listened tensely for what Theo would say next. But she said nothing. She turned to no one. With head erect and parted lips her eyes were fixed, as if she was looking at a vision. With the exception of Wally Stone, who seemed to be half asleep, there was no one in the room who was not waiting breathlessly for a word that would settle everything.

But the minutes went by and she did not speak. She might have been removed from them, removed to some strange spiritual land where her experience



was not to be related. She merely stood trance-like, with nothing but the wide-open wonder of the eyes to give a clew to what was passing in her mind.

Sheila ran with a light gilded chair, gently forcing her sister to sit down. She sat down absently. If the spell was broken, the intensity remained. She glanced at none of them. Rather she gazed into the golden unearthly light, struck from the flaming autumnal trees outside, which, streaming through the French windows, filled that end of the room with a radiance more heavenly than sunlight.

It was Mrs. Blent who brought them back to the commonplace, addressing George with her newly found authority. "I forbid my child to think of anything of the kind."

George, in his own defense, endeavored to explain himself. "I shouldn't have been driven to this stand if you hadn't all taunted me with being an adventurer on the hunt for a rich wife. I want to prove to you that I'm not. I was only a bookkeeper when I married Theo. Now I'm a receiving teller. That will not seem much to you, but I'm not going to remain a receiving teller, nor even a paying teller, nor even a cashier. I've got my chance. The thing's begun to move. I shan't let it stop till I can give Theo everything she's entitled to. But I'm going to do it on my own."

"And suppose you don't?" Spen questioned, with rising fury. "Suppose this tall talk ends in piffle, as I think it begins. What then?"

"Why, then," George answered, quietly, "Theo will have her money to fall back upon."

"And in the meantime, while you're making your fiasco, you're willing to put my sister through fifteen

or twenty years of misery. Theo, don't go on forever being a damn fool, for God's sake!"

To this appeal there was no response. Theo might not have heard it. She sat as before, her eyes on the unearthly light.

Mrs. Blent grew even more emphatic. "I shall not allow it. You may all take that as final. I simply shall not allow it."

Spен jumped to his feet, tossing the butt of his cigarette into an ash tray. "Well, I give it up. I've done my bit and I've nothing more to add. If Theo's got to be a fool she's got to be a fool, and no one is going to save her. I've offered the fellow my hand, and he wouldn't take it. That lets me out. The minute we're not talking facts I pass the whole thing up." Taking his hat from the chair on which he had flung it, he strolled to a French window, adding, as he passed Wally Stone, "See you when the powwow is over."

Spен having left them, Mrs. Blent turned to plead with the family friend. "Oh, Mr. Stone, do reason with her. She'll listen to you. With her father and me she's always been willful and disobedient."

Taking the cigar from his lips, Stone pulled himself up in his chair. Hitherto he had appeared somnolent. Now he struck into the discussion at a spot untouched by anybody else.

"George, you want to make your wife live on your salary and have nothing but what you can give her. Is that it?"

"No, sir; not exactly. I don't want to make my wife do anything." He looked toward Theo, who was still absorbed in her own vision. "She must be free

to choose—between her money and what I want to do.”

“And what you want to do is to work up to a position for yourself.”

“Giving her the chance to work up with me. I’ve come to the conclusion that a ready-made position is only second best. I’d accept it if I was born to it, but as I was not I shall get more fun out of fighting my own way.” Again he looked toward his wife, who did not look toward him. “Theo will, too, if she can see things as I do.”

“You seem to be pretty sure.”

“No, sir; but it’s not being sure that gives the thing its zest.”

“And yet zest won’t keep the money from pilin’ up, and some one’ll get it some day. Did it ever occur to you that you might have children?”

“I’ve thought of it now and then, yes, sir.”

“And you know that having children is a pretty costly business.”

“That’s what I’ve been told.”

“But if you have them you love them; and if you love them you’re anxious to do by them the best that your means make possible.”

“Yes, sir, I suppose so.”

“Well then, would you be doing by them the best that your means make possible when with hundreds of thousands in the bank you spent on them only what you could spare from your fifty a week?”

George considered. “In the first place, sir, I haven’t yet got the children. In the next, by the time I get them I hope to have more than fifty a week on which to bring them up.”

“But if you don’t?”

"I'm willing to take a chance. Without being wholly sure, I feel sure enough to want to take care of my own family and not pass the buck to Mr. Jackson Blent."

"But your working up is going to take time, fifteen or twenty years, perhaps, as Spen has just suggested. What do you think your children will say to you when they learn they've been brought up on the narrow edge of nothing, when they might have had the best of everything?"

"I think, sir, that *my* children will agree with me. It's not so bad to be brought up on the narrow edge of nothing. As far as I can see, it's a tonic that puts iron in the blood. It isn't the rich men's children who get along the best or figure highest in the history of the country. But that's in the future. The decision we must come to is for now."

"And the decision you've come to already is that you won't let Theo take her money—"

"I don't say that. But if she ever takes it I'd rather she took it when we know what to do with it. If we were to take it now we should be buried under it. We shouldn't know what to do with ourselves. We'd be hung up for life. Think of a bank teller with the income of three million dollars pouring in on him! He couldn't keep his job, for shame's sake."

Mrs. Blent moaned through her sobs. "But nobody would expect you to remain a bank teller. You could get better things to do."

"But I shouldn't know how to do them. I'm only in the bank-teller stage. Some day I hope to be bank president, but I couldn't be it now. I've got to learn. I must mount by degrees, and I think I'm going to. I may be wrong, of course, but somehow, since getting

into a small bank and working with people who follow what I do, that's the way I've come to feel." Again he turned to the trance-like figure which still remained in a trance. "If Theo does take her money—and I've no doubt that some day she will—I wish she'd wait till it wouldn't swamp us."

"What's the use of working your way up," Mrs. Blent demanded, tearfully, "when with a hundred and fifty thousand a year you're up already?"

George smiled dimly. "I don't think I could explain that. It's something born in you. It's a little like the difference between going up a mountain by means of a funicular and climbing it on your own two feet. Some like the one way, others like the other. To me the climbing is the better sport."

This Mrs. Blent waved aside impatiently. "And it isn't only that. It's the tag-rag-and-bobtail you've got to live with. All the time you're working up, as you call it, Theo'll know nobody, nobody. No one will ask her to dinner. She might as well be dead."

"And that's something she may find hard." Disregarding Theo, he moved a little nearer Mrs. Blent, speaking as if he took her into his confidence. "Theo didn't care for my friends last year; but I"—he squared his shoulders and held up his head—"but I can't give them up."

Her cry was one of horror. "What? You wouldn't give up a lot of people not much better than servants, if your wife wanted you to do it?"

"I'm not sure that she would want me." From Theo he thought these words might draw a Yes or a No, but in the immobile figure there was no change. "I wonder," he went on to Mrs. Blent, "if you can understand what it is to feel you must stand by people



not merely because you like them, but because you think they may need you. The class I call my friends is at least the second largest and by far the most poorly paid in the whole country. They're brave men and women, and I love them. I don't know what I could ever do for them, or whether or not they'd ever want me to do anything. But I know I can think, and at a pinch I can speak. I'm not sure that they'll go on forever satisfied to be penguins and oxen and raw material. Some day there may be trouble; and when it comes we'll need every man on that side who can help to adjust things by degrees instead of by the method of turning them upside down. That's why, Mrs. Blent, I don't want to leave my own people. I admire them; I trust them; *I love them*. I might be able to give them a hand, though of course they mightn't need me."

"And I," Mrs. Blent said, tartly, "don't wish my daughter to be mixed up in such a crowd. If you'd only have common sense! If you'd only take her money and make something of yourself! I can see you're presentable. You've got looks and manners and everything but position, and that we can supply you with. Don't throw yourself away, and expect Theo to abet you. She'll do nothing of the kind. For your own sake she'll be true to the ideals to which she's been brought up."

"We must let that rest with her."

Theo stirred. When she lifted her eyes to his their look was imploring, but beyond that he read nothing. Was she asking him to let her stay? Did she mean that she couldn't go back to a life of Elma Maggses and Lemuella Burrages, whatever the good she might do them? Was the road he was marking out for her

too hard? He couldn't tell. All he knew was that the road was his and that he must take it, if not with her, then alone.

When he spoke again it was to include them all. "I think we've said pretty nearly everything. I thank you, but I can't do anything but what I've told you. A year ago it might have been otherwise; but now . . ." He broke off to turn to his wife. "Theo, I've told you already that if you want me you must come after me."

Motionless, with hands clasped in her lap and lips still parted, she lifted her imploring eyes. George went on:

"What I mean is this. I'm asking you not to come with me. That would look as if I was taking you away. I'm going to leave you here and walk to the station. There'll be a train in about half an hour. If you wish to take it with me there's a car at the door which will get you there. But you must come of your own act—*after* me. If you come we shall have our life together, about which I needn't say any more. If you don't come—I shall go."

And on the words he went. He went with no further leave-taking or farewell. Limping and leaning on his stick, he did not look back, not even at his wife. In his strength and steadiness there was something dignified. There was even something heroic.

When he had passed the portières Mrs. Blent drew a long sigh. "Well, he's gone, and, darling, you must let him go. He's wild. He's not sane. It wouldn't be safe for you to risk your life with such a man. Do tell her so, Mr. Stone."

Wally Stone seemed to wake again. "Only a big woman, Theo, could do what he asks of you—make

her way up with him, stand by his side while he sticks to his people, and all that. Don't try to do it if you're a small one."

Sheila slipped out of the room. Theo sat still. She was out of her trance by this time, but inarticulate. For the thoughts of the past ten minutes words were not enough. They were more than thoughts; they were pages in living. She was living in the past; she was also living in the future. Taking the year in the Brooklyn flat, she spread it before her, making it cover all of the life she could see ahead. There would be the kitchen again and the tasks she was afraid of. There would be the living on a budget within which she could not keep. There would be the iceman, the provisionman, the laundryman. There would be Elma and Lemuella, with other forms and faces, but the same limitation of outlook, the same atrophy of the imaginative faculty. Since leaving George she had thrown off the terror of all this, never expecting to go back to it. Yet here it was. . . .

She was back at Atlantic City during the two days' honeymoon. His mute struggles not to spend the money she was forcing from his pocket were more apparent to her now than they had been then. But most apparent of all was the bit of self-revelation which had come to her about herself, that she hated poverty. She had hated it already without knowing what it was; and now she hated it with all the passion which she knew as hatred. Yet hating it as she did, the call had come to accept it, as if she had been a nun.

Nuns did accept it. The idea startled her. They—the word came to her from some forgotten page of reading—they *embraced* poverty. Not only women,

but good men did it, too, to be free to live worthier lives. They *embraced* poverty. They took it to them with desire. They had fewer obstacles to hold them back from doing what they cared about.

And George was embracing it, too. That was the spirit he was putting into his self-denial. The money would swamp him, would bury him under it; those were his words. It might bury her, too; it might swamp her. What others could embrace for the sake of being free she also could embrace for the sake of love. The harder it was the more it would purify her love; and the more purified her love the more it would sustain the man who, in the words she had read on Gordon's tomb in St. Paul's, was giving his treasure to the poor, his strength to the weak, and his heart to God. If he was not consciously doing all this, it was what in his blundering young man's way he was aiming at, and she could help him on.

Sheila came back with a suitcase, a coat, and a hat. The suitcase she set down beside her sister's chair; the coat she threw on another chair, placing the hat beside it. After that she returned to her place on the lowest of the long steps.

It could hardly be said that Theo was thinking; she was having illuminations, wave upon wave of light. She continued to sit silent. After Wally Stone's last words no one else addressed her. Spreading outward from her, silence fell upon them all. They waited, they watched her, while she seemed to be withdrawn. In one of the long windows toward which she looked she saw Spen and Helen Allenby, and knew, by some supersensuous faculty, that at last they were engaged. But she did not stir or smile or speak. The waves of light held her spellbound.

Spen would have entered the room to announce the great news, but Helen kept him back. The tense bearing of everyone but Aunt Katty told her that a crisis was upon them. To Theo she gave no more sign of recognition than Theo had given her. She, too, waited and watched.

Absently, as if thousands of miles away in consciousness, Theo put out her hand, picked up her hat, and put it on. The coat she threw over her arm. Having grasped the handle of the suitcase, she stood up.

There was not a word from anyone. Her great eyes, in which the blaze seemed to have been quenched by a swimming tenderness, turned first on one and then on another, but without a word. They rested at last on Spen and Helen Allenby with a long, sweet, gracious look. Then she turned away.

She went up the steps as George had done. No one helped her; no one held her back. A sob from her mother racked her heart as she pushed aside the portières, but the only words she heard were in Aunt Katty's sleepy parrot croak:

"You'll get over it, Augusta. You'll get over it. Everyone gets over everything."

THE END

















